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# THE CRISIS OF ETHIOPIAN EDUCATION

Some Implications for Nation-Building

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## PREFACE

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This study has its origins in a short paper I delivered at the Conference on Aspects of Ethiopian Development organized by the History Department, University of Trondheim, Norway in early 1987. My main concern at that time was the issue of the relevance of education to nation-building exemplified by the teaching of history in Ethiopian secondary schools. The salient feature of the article was its assumption that the teaching of history, in addition to being irrelevant, was detrimental to nation-building (Tekeste, 1987).

In the beginning of 1988, a slightly revised version of the 1987 article was submitted to SAREC (The Swedish Agency for Research and Economic Cooperation with Developing Countries) as a project proposal under the title, *Dimensions of the Crisis of Development: Education Versus Societal Development*. SAREC rejected the financing of the project on the grounds that it was not sufficiently developed.

The reasons for attempting to study the crisis of education and its implications for development and nation-building in a broader perspective are, firstly, a firm conviction that research on Ethiopian education is highly fragmented. Secondly, I strongly support the view that the Ethiopian public deserves a general (more popular) study on the state of education, designed to initiate wide discussion. Thirdly, although there has been a growing consensus on the crisis in Ethiopian education (since 1983), there is hardly any debate either on the social implications of the crisis or on the strategies for a substantial reform.

The project was revived by the generous interest and financial support of SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency), whose involvement in Ethiopian primary education has earned the Swedes an enviable position of respect among Ethiopians in all walks of life. SIDA recognized the need for a wider discussion (within Ethiopia) on the subject but pointed out the positive measures adopted by the Ethiopian government to expand and democratize access to education. I was strongly advised by SIDA to approach such a delicate issue with caution if my study was to avoid the hands of the censor in Ethiopia, and the risk of a total dismissal by the experts in educational research. SIDA's words of wisdom were, I believe, to a great extent motivated by the fact that I, a historian by training, was about to plunge into aspects of educational research where experts tread extremely carefully.

I am greatly indebted to SIDA, whose financial support made the completion of this study possible, and for the open and sincere expression of its views. I would in particular like to thank Mr. Bengt Troedsson of SIDA, who has treated me and the project in a manner that made it impossible to record either reservations or complaints. If somewhere in the text I have gone overboard, I want the reader to bear in mind that it was not due to lack of counsel.

The survey of Ethiopian education (conducted between March and June 1988) was made possible partly by a modest research grant from the Swedish Institute and by SAREC's planning grant.

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the project was patronized by the Minister of Education, Dr. Yayeh Rad Kitaw, whose personal authorization made it possible to receive copies of the report: *The Evaluative Research on the General Education System in Ethiopia*. The Minister assured me that the results of the research would be given careful consideration and expressed the hope that I would treat the material, as well as the issues, with due care.

Mr. Geoffrey Last, with his 36 years of service with the Ministry of Education, undoubtedly the most senior and knowledgeable expert, made available the documents in his official and private possession. At the Curriculum Department, I had the privilege of gaining the confidence of Assefa Beyene, M.Ed., and Altaye Gizaw, B.A., who stimulated and challenged my views on the complex facets of Ethiopian education.

The *Institute of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa University, provided invaluable support: firstly, by extending to me an institutional affiliation and secondly, by microfilming the documents that I was unable to consult in Addis. While acknowledging profound gratitude to the Institute as a whole, I would like to mention in particular, its director, Dr. Taddesse Beyene; and, the research assistants, Ato Mohamed Zacharia, Weizero Mena Zekiros, and Weizero Alem Tsehai Gizaw.

At the Entoto and Minilik II secondary schools, the teachers' commitment to their profession and their deep awareness of the crisis of education left me with one strong impression. Given the democratization of the evolution and implementation of educational policy, Ethiopia has the potential to develop suitable educational strategies. For their inspiring views on the future I would like to express my gratitude to Habtu Kifle and Getachew Mammo, both history teachers at Entoto Secondary School, Addis Ababa.

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This study is not designed with the intention of producing new knowledge; therefore, neither the questions it raises nor its conclusions are new. The tenuous connection between education and development, for instance, has been pointed out as early as the late 1960's (Coombs, 1968) and spelled out more clearly in the mid-1970's (Blaug, 1976), although some researchers continue to entertain ideas to the contrary (Draisma, 1987). The comparative perspective on *Education and National Development* (Fägerlind and Saha, 1983, 1986) provides an excellent review as well commentary on the limitations of education as an instrument of social change and development. As early as 1972 Emil Raddo voiced the concept that, contrary to the views held by many African countries including Ethiopia, the expansion of the education system would not necessarily result in economic development. This was restated by Anosike (1977) and finally given the imprint of universality by the UNESCO's Institute of Educational Planning (Weiler, 1980).

The considerable research on the role of education in closing the gap of social inequality has very little to offer. Hans Weiler's comparative survey (1978) reached the conclusion that, as a dependent variable, education has very little intrinsic power to affect social and regional inequalities. In the African context, Philip Foster's study of education and social inequality (1980) drew the rather obvious conclusion that African states are far from evolving political strategies that could result in the restructuring of the educational system. Similar conclusions were reached by David Court (1976) concerning the educational systems of Tanzania and Kenya and by Gerald Fry (1981). The limits of social change that can be brought about through education alone were poignantly pointed out by Martin Carnoy (1980) and Henry Levin (1980).

The role of education as primarily ideological, that is, the reproduction of nationalism, patriotism and the perpetuation of the classes, which is the central thesis of this study, has gained firmer ground since Martin Carnoy's polemical opening (1974). The more recent research of divergent authors such as Karabel (1977) and Michael Apple (1982) bear witness to this fact.

However, seen within the Ethiopian context, this study is both new and the first of its kind. The argument that Ethiopian intellectuals ought to have a thorough knowledge of their country's historical heritage as a precondition for the evolution of a meaningful curriculum is made here for the first time. Although the role of the past in the making of the future has been extensively theorized (E.P. Thompson, 1978), this study is the first to attempt to make it concrete for Ethiopian realities.



This study is also the first to argue that the evolution of educational policy should be accessible to a wider public. Ethiopian educational policy has always been developed behind closed doors – a practice that once contributed to a social upheaval (see chapter one).

In spite of the good intentions of the leaders of the new Republic, the evolution of educational policy is still carried out without the participation of the social forces concerned, namely, teachers and parents. Moreover, the policy evolved behind closed doors is poorly disseminated to the public. By surveying the history of Ethiopian education and by commenting on the state of education, accompanied by an outline of the scope and nature of reform, this study provides a holistic interpretation of the education system of the country. Notwithstanding the omissions and distortions inherent in such an undertaking, a holistic interpretation is necessary in order to initiate a public discussion.

There is yet another reason for the relevance of a survey such as this one. The state of research seems to suffer from lack of imagination. With very few exceptions, research is limited to that carried out at the Ph.D. level, and there are very few studies; not more than a dozen theses were completed from the early 1960's to the end of 1970's. Moreover, most of these theses were closely related to educational planning. Chronologically these were as follows: Maaza Bekele (1966) on the history of modern education with emphasis on primary education; Edouardo Trudeau (1968) on higher education with implications for future planning and development; Hailu Tickhaer (1968) on improved staff utilization as a remedy for teacher shortage; Ole-Christian Bjerkan (1972) on plans, targets, and trends in Ethiopian education; Beyene Negewo (1977) on the impact of university education on political attitudes; and finally, Tsehay Teffera (1977) with a socio-linguistic survey of language use in Ethiopia.

Most of these unpublished theses deal with specialized and narrowly defined areas, and a good number of them are outdated. Furthermore, they are highly inaccessible.

A category of sources even more inaccessible consists of the reports and evaluations commissioned by the Ministry of Education. These reports, compiled in the comfortable knowledge that their contents would not be made public, (since most of them are classified as secret) are so voluminous that their wider distribution causes a real logistical problem. Compiled at regular intervals, these reports are largely repetitive and deal to a great extent with the internal matters of the Ministry of Education.

For the teacher, the parent, or the concerned citizen in search of

literature on the state of Ethiopian education, there is very little available. The *Ethiopia Observer*, a bimonthly periodical (1957-1975) that featured many informative articles on the state of education, has not yet been revived after its sudden collapse in 1975. The *Ethiopian Journal of Education* (since 1967), with its irregular numbers, has been less informative than the *Ethiopia Observer*.

Up to 1988 readers who had contacts with North America were left with Teshome Wagaw's book on *Education in Ethiopia*, published at Ann Arbor, Michigan. Covering the period up to 1972, Teshome's book dealt with the country's modern history seen from the development of the educational infrastructures. Teshome ends his survey with the *Education Sector Review* (1972), where the imperial regime tried unsuccessfully to initiate a sector reform.

Since 1988, a couple hundred Ethiopians, have had access to Christine McNab's excellent monograph (1988) on *Language Policy and Language Practice in Ethiopian Education*. In many ways McNab's study complements that of Teshome and brings up to date the ups and downs of the education sector up to 1987.

Although the fortunate reader who was able to obtain the highly inaccessible works of Teshome and McNab would have learned a great deal, he or she would be left with many questions unanswered. How serious is the crisis of education? What are the social and political implications of the crisis? How does an education such as the one received in Ethiopian schools facilitate development? The crisis of education exemplified by the decline in the quality of education is a well-known reality among teachers (about 100,000 of them) and among those who passed through the system prior to 1975, most of whom are now parents. It is primarily to these groups that this study is directed.

There are several limitations and weaknesses that need pointing out. Experts on educational research may argue that I draw broad conclusions on the basis of a very limited empirical foundation. My argument, that the goal of universal literacy (advocated by UNESCO) reveals more a Eurocentric bias than an intrinsic relevance of literacy for development, may arouse strong reactions. In Ethiopia, my suggestion that far more attention be paid to non-formal rather than formal education with the former getting most of the budget, may be read as a signal for yet another radical restructuring of the sector. However, I need not apologize too much. With the best intentions I have argued my position and presented an interpretation of the state of Ethiopian education. The effort put into this book would be more than fulfilled, if the views expressed here are answered with arguments.

I express my warmest thanks to Dr. Michael Stahl, who read the

manuscript and proposed many valuable improvements, some of which I was unable to incorporate and others which I did not want to include.

In her comments to this study, Dr. Christine McNab has expressed a deep concern over the "urban\elitist tone" of the final chapter. While deploring the fact that I received her comments at a very late stage, I look forward to enter into a discussion on the subject.

Here at the Department of History, I am greatly indebted to a dear friend, Dr. Marie C. Nelson, for prompt and never-failing editorial assistance. She has also shared with me her wide knowledge of the history of education of black Americans. Associate Professor John Rogers, and Dag Blanck were kind enough to accept the tedious burden of proof-reading. I am also grateful for the comments made by my colleague, Tsegaye Tegenu and by Maria L. Leiva, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Mattias Tydén at the Centre for Multiethnic Research did all the technical work short of printing it himself.

*The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies* has once again proved its readiness to disseminate new knowledge by undertaking the task of distribution.

It is with great pleasure that I acknowledge the constant support and encouragement of Berit Sahlström, a friend and a wife.

Last, but not least, I wish to enter into the record my sincere gratitude to Professors Urban Dahllöf and Sverker Lindblad, whose profound interdisciplinary commitment made possible the publication of this modest study in their prestigious series.

*Tekeste Negash, History Department, Uppsala, March 21, 1990.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Ethiopian Educational System: A Brief Historical Outline

#### *The foundations of modern education, ca. 1900 to 1935*

Modern public education made a modest entry into the history of the country in the beginning of this century (1908) with the establishment of the Minilik School. The idea for the school was certainly inspired by the mission schools that sporadically appeared after the middle of the nineteenth century. The Ethiopian Church, which up to that period had a virtual monopoly on education, strongly opposed the establishment of a secular school. The Ethiopian Church feared the undermining potential of a state school system managed, at least initially, by European teachers. Emperor Minilik (ruled 1889-1913) overcame Church opposition by giving in to many of its demands. The emperor stressed that the school would only be engaged in the teaching of foreign languages – the proficiency of which was essential for the maintenance of the country's independence. Moreover, as a clear concession to the Church, the first teachers were to be Copts from Egypt – a group who, because of their faith, were unlikely to undermine the teachings of the Ethiopian Church.<sup>1</sup>

Minilik School was not perceived as an instrument for the development of the country. Its existence was justified on purely political grounds. The presence of Ethiopians knowledgeable in European languages was considered crucial for the maintenance of sovereignty. The ruling elite of the period saw a close link between the country's independence and the presence of Ethiopians capable of communicating with the outside world.

During the first twenty years of its existence, Minilik School resembled a language institute rather than a proper school. There was no age limit for admission, but a prior knowledge of Amharic was a prerequisite. French, English, Italian and Arabic were the main subjects taught. Graduates found ready employment both in government and in the foreign legations. Between 1908 and 1925 approximately three thousand students passed through the school. In 1925 Minilik School had 160 students, 20 per cent of whom had been enrolled for four or more years.<sup>2</sup>

By the 1920's church opposition to the establishment of secular

education, as well as to the continued operation of the mission schools, had greatly diminished. Although Minilik School remained the only state financed institution, the scope and breadth of mission schools increased considerably. Regent Taffari Mekonnen, later Emperor Haile Selassie, patronized the activities of the missions in general and of the Swedish and American missions in particular. His views (fully quoted in the footnote) are indicative of the attitude of the period.<sup>3</sup>

The second government school was established by Regent Taffari Mekonnen in 1925. Like the Minilik School, the Taffari Mekonnen School functioned as a school for the teaching of foreign languages with the difference that Ethiopian religion was supposed to be taught in the latter. In the words of its founder:

In this school it is not only foreign languages that I have instituted, but there would also be study of our country's holy books and the Monophysite faith. One who proposes to devote himself to foreign languages when he has not properly mastered the language and literature of his own country is like a boat without a rower.<sup>4</sup>

It was, however, with the imposition of a special education tax in 1926 that one can speak of the beginning of a national education system.<sup>5</sup> This was because, in a strict sense, both Minilik and Taffari Mekonnen schools were funded by their founders and not by the government. From 1926 onwards, the government had a budget for education. By the time the "developmentalist" Taffari Mekonnen became emperor in 1930, assuming the throne name Haile Selassie, the building of schools had become a status symbol among the powerful elite.

The view that Ethiopia, once a great and powerful nation, had stagnated due to conservatism and resistance to change, had gained ground by the 1920's. Ethiopian contemporary authors such as Gebrehiwet Baykedagn, Blatta Gebregziabeher Gila Mariam, Afework Gebreyesus, and Aleqa Tayye Gebre Mariam had repeatedly pointed out the backwardness of Ethiopia.<sup>6</sup> From this early period, the modern school was seen as the institution which possessed the mysterious key to rapid development. Regent Taffari Mekonnen's views on the role of education, expressed as early as 1928, are striking for their contemporaneity.

Although the greatness of Ethiopia and the history of all her achievements may be found fully recorded in the books of many learned men, I constantly revert in my speeches to this

theme of her past history, to show how the dissensions that arose within the country in former times pulled her back and prevented her regular breathing; now, however, through the education of her children, her voice is beginning to grow stronger and she is getting back her breath satisfactorily. Her history is being revealed in her deeds and glimmers of light may already be seen.<sup>7</sup>

In spite of the fact that Haile Selassie did not explain his allusions to Ethiopia's past, he seemed to have had very strong views on the positive role of education. His ideas concerning the objectives of education were no doubt derived from the Swedish and American mission schools with their emphasis on loyalty to king and country. Haile Selassie's ideal for a school was that of a mission school. The introduction of religious education strongly suggests the inspiration of missionary activities and the spiritual commitment of Haile Selassie himself.

On the eve of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, there were eight primary schools. In the provinces, there were a total of 14 schools – most of which were privately financed.<sup>8</sup> There were also several more mission schools that provided different types of primary education.<sup>9</sup> Prior to 1935, according to the pioneering study of Richard Pankhurst, up to two hundred Ethiopians may have traveled abroad for further education.<sup>10</sup> Compared to the countries of colonial Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia had far fewer schools.<sup>11</sup> On the eve of the invasion Eritrea had more primary schools than the empire of Ethiopia.<sup>12</sup> The Ethiopian education system has been discussed by the American educator Thomas Jesse Jones and by Olle Ericksson, the head of the Swedish Evangelical Mission to Ethiopia.<sup>13</sup>

The brief Italian occupation (1936-41) seriously disrupted the educational system that had just begun to emerge. Government schools were either closed down or were requisitioned for military purposes. To the extent that they were engaged in education, the Italians had very different objectives. During their precarious exercise of power the Italians did much to disrupt the education system they inherited by their lack of interest and by their systematic elimination of educated Ethiopians.<sup>14</sup>

When the Italians left Ethiopia in 1941, the imperial government began to lay down the educational foundations virtually from scratch. The first postwar schools were opened in 1942, and that year's expenditure on education amounted to 600,000 *birr*.<sup>15</sup> There was an extreme shortage of teachers and textbooks, although some British

staff from the British Council were available to the government.

From 1942 until 1955, the Ethiopian government was frantically engaged in the expansion of the education system without sufficient consideration as to relevance. Under the leadership of Haile Selassie, who held the portfolio of Minister of Education until 1966, the education sector functioned without curriculum guidelines and relevant textbooks.<sup>16</sup> The late emperor continued to believe, as in the 1920's, that education held the key to Ethiopia's development.

The high expenditure on education in relation to total expenditure, as well as the geometric growth of student enrollment remain strong witnesses to the interest and commitment of the late emperor. Expenditure on education rose from just over half a million *birr* in 1942 to over 19 million by 1958-59. By 1959-60, enrollment in government schools had reached nearly a quarter of a million pupils, just over 50,000 of whom were females.<sup>17</sup>

With the exception of Eritrea, where teaching materials in Tigrinya were widely used, the schools in the rest of the country lacked textbooks at the elementary level.<sup>18</sup> Teaching at the elementary level (the first four years) and in the intermediate grades (grades five to eight) was virtually left up to the teachers. Secondary teachers had relatively fewer problems in locating teaching manuals, since they were the same as those used in Great Britain. Until 1960 students were encouraged to sit for the General Certificate of the University of London Examination – a practice that resolved, to some extent the teachers' predicament.<sup>19</sup>

In 1943 there were 19,000 students in the country. Six years later the total enrollment had increased to just under 53,000.<sup>20</sup> Enrollment continued to rise sharply and passed the 90,000 mark by 1954-55.<sup>21</sup> If there were shortcomings in the Ethiopian education system during the 1942-55 period, they were not debated. The modernization process, which began to transform the public image of the state, called for the rapid training of pupils sufficiently fluent in foreign languages. The creation and staffing of the various ministries and authorities along the Western European model favoured the consolidation of a Western type of formal education.

According to Edward Jandy, an American education expert who served in Ethiopia in the middle of the 1940's, "the second highest item in the national budget" was education. Emperor Haile Selassie, we are told, had "no keener interest in any functional unit of his government than in the Ministry of Education – a unit more intelligently staffed, efficient and forward looking than any other ministry."<sup>22</sup> The emperor believed strongly that the new Ethiopia could

not progress without education, but he certainly did not reflect on the type of education conducive to the development of his country.

The educational system expanded too rapidly and provided a programme hardly related to the realities of the country. In 1946, a school day at any one of the twelve schools in Addis Ababa might have fitted the description provided by Edward Jandy:

Now let us look in upon a typical classroom of any elementary or other school. Here we really sense the crucial nature of the educational situation as it exists for pupil and instructor alike. I have entered some classrooms where the only text available was in the instructor's hands. Sometimes, there were two textbooks for the whole classroom! In the best schools there was rarely more than a text for every two pupils. Blackboards were lacking, so also were slates and crayons. Very little or no paper – not even scratch pads – and few pencils, or pens and ink with which to practice writing were to be had. The result is that teaching has been mainly on an oral level with not much pupil participation. Most of this critical shortage is due to the fact that in this immediate postwar period supplies from abroad are still difficult to get....

Add to the above classroom situation the fact that the pupils had to learn a foreign language (English) from foreign textbooks with illustration material alien to their own culture, and you get a dramatic picture of the crucial nature of the educational process for both pupils and instructors.<sup>23</sup>

At the time when Edward Jandy left Ethiopia in 1946, there were 34,844 students of whom 3,374 were girls.<sup>24</sup>

The structure of the educational system was a hybrid derived from Great Britain and from neighbouring African countries, for example, Sudan and Kenya. A three tier system (4+4+4) was followed whereby the first four years were designated as primary, the next four years as middle or intermediate, and the third four-year period as secondary. From mid-1940's and throughout the 1950's students were expected to sit for the General School Leaving Certificates Examination from Great Britain. The practice began to decline with the successive growth of the University College at Addis Ababa (established in 1951). By the mid-1960's the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate had become the only valid diploma.

While the ruling elite (the royalty and those engaged in the administration of education) up to 1954 remained unaware of the

social contradictions that the educational system was bound to bring about, the United States' aid organizations by this period had assembled sufficient knowledge on the educational sector. As a part of the aid package deal, the Americans began to shape the Ethiopian educational policy through an Education Advisory Group - assimilated into The Long Term Planning Committee under the Vice Minister of Education.<sup>25</sup>

In its final report the Long Term Planning Committee recommended the introduction of community schools for basic education.<sup>26</sup> The committee also recommended that the curriculum be designed to fit the student for better living in his home community and environment.<sup>27</sup> It further advocated that educational objectives be geared to the quickest possible spread of universal fundamental education. Moreover, the committee called for the schools to teach students effective command of Amharic.<sup>28</sup> If George Lipsky's account is correct, Ethiopian schools had no Amharic manuals until the experts from the University of Oklahoma designed and published the first reader in 1955.<sup>29</sup>

#### *Consolidation and decline, 1955-1972*

With the establishment of a permanent body within the Ministry of Education (MOE) entrusted to implement the recommendations of the Long-Term Planning Committee, the education system began to gain more permanent structural features. The rapid expansion of elementary (primary) education was envisaged in order to provide candidates for the secondary and higher institutions, which had vacancies up to the mid-1960's. More attention was to be paid to teacher training and the curriculum. The First Five Year Development Plan, 1957-62 stressed even more the need for manpower planning.

With a continuous influx of aid from the United States, the educational sector expanded at a rate that could hardly be justified by the growth of national revenue. Enrollment in public schools increased from about 35,000 in 1946 to approximately 95,000 in 1954-55.<sup>30</sup>

While the Emperor Haile Selassie continued to believe that he was laying down the foundations for the rapid development of the "New Ethiopia," some young Ethiopians were reflecting upon the basic problems of the educational sector. In one of these rare reflections, Dr. Mulugeta Wodajo, writing in 1958, pointed out four conspicuous limitations of the system. These were i) the inadequacy of the system; ii) the irrelevance of the curriculum; iii) the administrative and intellectual confusion created by the deliberate recruitment of teachers

from many nations; and iv) overcentralization.<sup>31</sup>

The shortcomings outlined above were frequently mentioned from the latter part of the 1960's but not the conclusion that the author drew at such an early period:

If the schools are to preserve their identity, the Ethiopian national system of education must be both a reflection of the past and a guide to the future. The educational system must in the first place aid in the transmission of the nation's cultural heritage from one generation to the next and, in addition, it must train capable persons who have the ability to interpret, enrich, and adopt that heritage to new needs and to changing conditions as they may arise.... Any system of education in Ethiopia that fails to satisfy these demands is bound to make the country a lost nation - a nation living in darkness whom the world will forget and ignore.<sup>32</sup>

There was hardly time for the warning signals of Dr. Mulugeta Wodajo to be given the consideration they deserved. The decade of the 1960s brought with it a conception of education akin to magic formulae that would bring about national development. With the UNESCO-sponsored Conference of African States on the Development of Education in Africa held in 1961 at Addis Ababa, educational plans and targets became the affairs of the United Nations and other non-governmental organizations.<sup>33</sup> According to the resolution of the *Conference on African Education*, Ethiopia, compared to other African countries, lagged far behind in educational development.<sup>34</sup>

The objectives set down by the *Addis Ababa Conference on African Education*, i.e., universal primary education by 1980, plunged Ethiopia into a policy of expansion of the sector without regard to quality, relevance, and job opportunities. That the education sector did not expand according to the intent of the Addis Ababa plan was mainly due to lack of funds.

Equipped with the recommendations of the Long-Term Planning Committee and the resolutions of the *Addis Ababa Conference on African Education* (1961), the Ministry of Education proceeded to expand education well beyond its financial limits. Most of the expansion especially in buildings and equipment, was financed by a series of World Bank loans.<sup>35</sup> The decade of the 1960's witnessed the expansion of the sector, the introduction of a series of restructuring measures, and a growing awareness of the need for a more comprehensive reform. Enrollment at all levels increased from just



over 196,000 in 1960-61 to over 1,100,000 by 1974-75.<sup>36</sup>

The dramatic expansion of education notwithstanding, Ethiopia was by 1974-75 very far from meeting the target of universal primary education set out by the *Conference on African Education*. By 1974 primary education was accessible to only twelve per cent of the primary school age population. And yet, since the drastic expansion of the educational sector was not accompanied by a comparable expansion of the economic sector, students were beginning to perceive a future of unemployment after completion of secondary education. According to Desta Asayehegn's assessment, by 1974 up to 25 per cent of secondary school graduates were unemployed.<sup>37</sup>

While the education sector, gaining its own momentum, expanded virtually uncontrolled, the Ministry of Education attempted to restructure the system without any significant success. In 1963-64 the grade structure was changed from the 4+4+4 year combination into six years of primary school, followed by two years of junior secondary and a four-year secondary programme, that is a 6+2+4 year combination. With the new structure for the first time Amharic became the only language of instruction at the primary level – the most significant reform of the decade.<sup>38</sup>

Another area where an attempt at some reform was initiated was curriculum. While the measures aimed at evolving a national curriculum for primary education were partially successful,<sup>39</sup> similar attempts for secondary schools proved most intractable.<sup>40</sup> Up to 1970 more than half of the secondary school teachers were English-speaking foreigners – a teaching corps whose commitment to long-term national interests was indeed marginal.<sup>41</sup> In spite of some attempts to introduce non-academic subjects into the secondary school curriculum, the predominance of academic subjects remained in tact.<sup>42</sup>

By the end of 1969 Ethiopian urban society and the educational sector were in a serious crisis. The modern economic sector (both public and private) proved too limited to accommodate secondary graduates. Due to the unequal access to education, virtually all the secondary schools were located in Addis Ababa, Shoa province, and Asmara.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, most of the unemployed secondary graduates were found in the two major cities.

Fully aware of the bleak prospects for the future, from 1970 onwards secondary students had begun to stage demonstrations and to boycott classes. The university students, who from mid-1960's assumed the role of the only organized opposition, began campaigning for a clean break with the country's history and tradition. The university students' boundless hatred of their country and its society and therefore, their

determination to dictate a socialist ideology, lacked the most minimum knowledge of the dynamics of social change.<sup>44</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the educational sector was also voiced by conservative elements; the church and the nobility pointed out that those who passed through the modern school were disrespectful of their society and its institutions. They argued that there was very little that was Ethiopian in the curriculum. Furthermore, they pointed to the problem of employment facing secondary graduates – a most paradoxical situation in a country where only about four per cent of the age group had access to secondary education and where over 90 per cent of the population were illiterate.

Dissatisfaction from abroad dealt with Ethiopia's extremely poor performance in its efforts to achieve universal literacy by the year 1980 according to the pledge entered by Ethiopia at the *Conference on African Education* held in Addis Ababa in 1961.

As a response to the above criticisms, the Imperial government made one of its boldest policy decisions, namely to conduct a thorough review of the educational sector.<sup>45</sup> The *Education Sector Review* was officially constituted in October 1971 with the following responsibilities:

- to analyse the education and training system of Ethiopia and its capability of promoting economic, social and cultural development;
- to suggest whenever necessary ways to improve and expand the education and training system in order that it might achieve aims relevant both to the society and the overall development of the country;
- to suggest ways in which education could best be utilized to promote a national integration and;
- to identify priority studies and investments in education and training.

The *Education Sector Review* (ESR) was made up of 81 experts, 51 of whom were Ethiopians. Although in the course of its brief existence (October 1971 to August 1972) the ESR left behind precious documentation on the Ethiopian educational system, it hardly confronted the issues for which it was established. Instead, it devoted its attention to strategies for a rapid expansion of primary education with the view of achieving universal literacy before the year 2000.<sup>46</sup> Universal literacy was justified on the ground that it was a long denied right of all citizens of the country.

The ESR proposed three alternatives designed to hasten the pace of primary education. The first alternative proposed a three tier system based on six years of primary, four years of junior secondary and four years of senior secondary schooling (6+4+4 years). It was envisaged that this system would work with the introduction of a double shift system and the lengthening of the school year from 180 days to 220 days.

Alternative two, with which ESR is closely identified, called for a system based on four years of primary education (known as minimum formation education) for the great majority of the population. About twenty percent would then proceed to follow another four year junior secondary programme. The best of those completing grade eight would be allowed to attend the four year senior secondary programme. Alternative two with its 4+4+4 year system was slightly different from alternative one, where the duration of primary education was six years. Alternative two was no doubt designed to limit the expansion of secondary education.<sup>47</sup>

Alternative three was a modification of alternative two (4+2+4 years), where the junior secondary programme was reduced from four to two years. It was suggested that students begin grade one at nine years of age.

The ESR estimated that over 90 per cent of the primary school age group would have access to education by the year 2000, if either alternatives two or three were adopted for implementation.<sup>48</sup>

The ESR conference that met in August 1972 approved alternative two together with the proposal for basic formation education (4+2 years) taken from alternative three. It was also envisaged that secondary education would increase at the rate of the growth of the population, estimated at 2.1 per cent per annum. This was indeed a sharp decrease compared with the over 10 per cent annual increment of senior secondary enrollment during the decade of the 1960's.

The most radical aspect of the ESR was that it made the rural population the target of educational policy. However, a serious oversight was committed when the ESR urged the government to implement the recommendations prior to a nationwide debate extending over several years.<sup>49</sup>

The recommendations of the ESR would have had far-reaching implications had they been implemented. They were not implemented largely because the urban population (teachers, secondary students and parents) rightly perceived the reform as detrimental to their interests. The ESR recommendations favoured the countryside and the rural population at the expense of the urban population. The

countryside and the rural population lost the struggle, because in this poorly articulated controversy over allocation of scarce resources, the urban population saw to it that its interests were best served.

Although doomed to failure, the ESR and the crisis of the education sector were swept away in the successive wave of local and national strikes that began early in 1974 and continued unabated until the overthrow of the Imperial system in September 1974.

### *Old problems and new challenges, 1975-1990*

The new state assumed its responsibilities with two rather controversial interpretations of the educational policies of the former regime. The new state pointed out repeatedly that the educational policy of the Imperial regime was elitist (favouring some regions and urban areas) and that the curriculum did not take into account the concrete conditions in the country.<sup>50</sup> With hindsight it can now be argued that the Imperial educational policy was no more elitist than the policy pursued by the post-Revolution state. On the eve of its downfall the Imperial regime confronted the twin issues of limiting secondary enrolment to the country's absorption capacity, as well as extending universal primary education. The rate of expansion of the sector between the last fifteen years of the Imperial regime (from 1960 up to 1974) and the first fifteen years of the Post-Revolution state (1975-89)) is indeed comparable. Enrollment (including those in private schools) increased from 224,934 in 1959-60 to 1,042,900 in 1974-75 or at the rate of about 15 per cent per annum. During the 1975-89 period enrollment increased from 1,042,900 to 3,926,700 or at a rate of about 12 per cent annually.<sup>51</sup>

The Post-Revolution State is indeed correct in its criticism of the Imperial educational policy for pursuing a curriculum that was foreign to the needs of the country. Although the new state showed a far more consistent concern over the need of evolving an appropriate curriculum, the case of the history curriculum for secondary schools strongly suggests that in reality far less has been done. This is discussed in chapter three below.

The Post-Revolution State accepted the challenge of expanding the education sector on the assumption that education held the key to the country's development.<sup>52</sup> In contrast to the Imperial regime the Post-Revolution State appears to be fully aware that national development would be possible only with the expansion of education. This view, first laid down in the National Democratic Revolution (1976), was further elaborated in the five volume policy document known as the General

Directives of Ethiopian Education produced by the Ministry of Education in 1980.<sup>53</sup>

An area that the Post-Revolution State has every reason to be proud of deals, of course, with the literacy campaign. Established in 1979, the National Literacy Campaign Coordinating Committee managed to spread literacy among ten million people by 1983. The result of these literacy campaigns was that the rate of illiteracy was reduced from about 93 per cent in 1975 to 37 per cent in 1983. Ethiopia has been internationally acclaimed for its successful campaign against illiteracy, although more intractable problems, such as the impact of literacy on national development, have yet to be seriously looked into.<sup>54</sup>

Between 1976 and 1982, junior and senior secondary school enrollment expanded well beyond the absorption capacity of the economy. As early as 1980, the MOE began to send warning signals to the government concerning the social problems created by the expansion of secondary education.<sup>55</sup> At the same time the MOE devised a plan designed to avoid the growing pool of unemployable secondary school graduates. According to this plan, emphasis would be placed on providing eight years of universal polytechnical education and on a curriculum that would enhance integration into the world of labour.<sup>56</sup> This policy, partially accepted by the government, had the ambition of providing eight years of universal education to all children of primary school age by 1986.<sup>57</sup>

As this book goes to print, the MOE is in the process of seeking the approval of the government for a new educational policy that would entitle every citizen to a ten year polytechnical education.<sup>58</sup>

The Post-Revolution State is certainly more inclined to meet the social, economic, political and educational challenges than its predecessor. It is my firm belief that the crisis of the education sector that is outlined in chapter six below did not arise due to the lack of commitment from the government but due to a variety of misconceptions about education and its role in society. Therefore, this study is conducted with the aim of initiating a debate on reform of the sector by questioning some hitherto unassailable assumptions.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed and narrative description on the foundations of the first schools, see the pioneering study by Richard Pankhurst, "The Foundations of Education, Printing, Newspapers, Book Production, Libraries and Literacy in Ethiopia," in *Ethiopia Observer*, 6:3 (1962) 241-90.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Jesse Jones, *Education in East Africa. A Study of East Central and South Africa by the Second African Education Commission under the auspices of the*

*Phelps-Stokes Fund, in cooperation with the International Education Board*, New York, 1925, p. 326.

<sup>3</sup> Address by Taffari Mekonnen to the missionaries of Addis Ababa at a dinner given in their honour at the palace in November 1923.

"It is with great pleasure that I express my thanks to you for having accepted the invitation to come here on this occasion. Not alone on my behalf have I invited you to come tonight, you men who have come from the remotest countries of Sweden and America, but on behalf of her whom you have come to serve with such a spirit of self-denial; it is Ethiopia which in my person presents to you her most profound gratitude. I, therefore, thank you on behalf of Ethiopia for having the desire to spread knowledge here.

It is historically proved that Ethiopia, our country which lies at one extreme end of Africa, has had its own government for many ages. Eversince the time she embraced Christianity in the third century (*sic*) up to recent times, she was engaged in bloody conflicts against Moslems and heathen in order to defend her Christianity. The enemies, however, failed to subject her and force her to deny her religion. On account of these facts, Ethiopia could not advance her power.

You honourable educators, who give instruction and direct the minds of the young people, however, are accomplishing this noble work. You are not teaching them solely how to read and write, how to calculate, but are also instructing them to be good servants of their country and to consider such service among sacred things. You teach them that the cause of the deplorable evils that afflict humanity in this world is selfishness. You teach them that what brings honor and greatness to human beings is justice and helping each other. You have fulfilled the principle of helping others and renouncing self-love. You have taken as the basis of your work the words of the Gospel, 'The man who gave to the poor loaned to God.' You, without expecting any recompense here, are accomplishing a great service." (Quoted in Thomas Jesse Jones, *Education in East Africa*, p. 332.)

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Richard Pankhurst, "The Foundations of Education", p. 267.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 268-9.

<sup>6</sup> Gebrehiwet Baykedagn, *Ethiopia and Minilik*, Asmara, 1912. Composed in Amharic, this concise essay pointed out the strong anti-modernization views within the Ethiopian Church and the nobility. On the views and political thinking of Blatta Gebregziabeher see Tekeste Negash, *No Medicine for the bite of a white snake: Notes on Nationalism and Resistance in Eritrea, 1890-1940*, Uppsala, 1986, pp. 1-16. Aleqa Tayye Gebre Mariam, *The History of the People of Ethiopia*, in Amharic, first published in Asmara in 1922. The eighth Amharic edition and the first English translation by Grover Hudson and Tekeste Negash has been published by the Centre for Multiethnic Research, Uppsala University, Uppsala, 1987. Second printing, 1988. Professor Afewerik Gebreyesus' most famous sociopolitical study is on the *History of Ethiopia and Emperor Minilik*.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Richard Pankhurst, "The Foundations of Education," p. 269.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>9</sup> For the number and type of mission schools available in Ethiopia during the 1920's, see Thomas Jesse Jones, *Education in East Africa*, pp. 327-30.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Pankhurst, "The Foundations of Education," pp. 272-79.



<sup>11</sup> Thomas Jesse Jones, *Education in East Africa*, p. 330.

<sup>12</sup> For the state of education in Eritrea during the colonial period, see Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882-1941*, Stockholm, 1987, pp. 66-91.

<sup>13</sup> Olle Erickson, "Education in Ethiopia," *African Affairs*, 5:3 (1932) 338-43.

<sup>14</sup> For the history and practice of Italian education in Ethiopia during the colonial period, see Richard Pankhurst, "Education in Ethiopia during the Italian Fascist Occupation (1936-41)," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 5:3 (1972) 361-96.

<sup>15</sup> For the figures on educational expenditure from 1942 until 1958-59, see "Education Report: Analysis of Developments in Recent Years," *Ethiopia Observer*, 5:1 (1961), p. 71.

<sup>16</sup> According to Maaza Bekele, the first attempt to unify curricular offerings at the primary level was made in 1947. The elementary school curriculum for grades 1 to 6 was worked out by a committee consisting largely of foreigners. The official curriculum stated that Amharic should be the language of instruction in the first two grades with a gradual transition to English, beginning in the third grade. Maaza Bekele, *A Study of Modern Education in Ethiopia. Its foundations, its development, its future, with emphasis on primary education*, Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1966, p. 83.

<sup>17</sup> "Education Report: Analysis of Developments in Recent Years," *Ethiopia Observer*, 5:1 (1961), p. 61. The breakdown was as follows: 972 schools (includes mission, private and those schools run by the Ethiopian Church), 6511 teachers; 5938 classrooms; 224,934 students, 51,439 of whom were girls. Whereas 181,163 pupils were enrolled in government schools, the remaining 44,771 students were the responsibility of mission, church and private corporate bodies.

<sup>18</sup> For a description of the colonial textbooks used in Eritrea, see Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism*, pp. 66-91.

<sup>19</sup> George Lipsky, *Ethiopia*, p. 94.

<sup>20</sup> Ethiopian Government, *Ministry of Education Year Book for 1949-50*, edited by A. Talbot, Addis Ababa, 1952, p. 84.

<sup>21</sup> Mulugeta Wedajo, "Postwar Reform in Ethiopian Education," *Comparative Education Review*, 2:3 (1959) p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> Edward C. Jandy, "The New Ethiopia and Socioeducational Problems," *Sociology and Social Research*, 33:1 (1948) 113-24, p. 115.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20.

<sup>24</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, "Education in Ethiopia," *New Times and Ethiopia News*, 1946, pp. 22-3, quoted by Ole-Christian Bjerkan, *Plans, Targets, and Trends in Ethiopian Education*, Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1972, p. 61.

<sup>25</sup> I regret that I did not have access to the final report of the Long Term Planning Committee. The report is discussed, however, by several authors, for example, Teshome Wagaw, *Education in Ethiopia*, Ann Arbor, 1979, pp. 105-07; George Lipsky, *Ethiopia*, p. 91. For an even more detailed commentary see Ole-Christian Bjerkan, *Plans, Targets and Trends in Ethiopian Education*, 1972, pp. 110-116.

<sup>26</sup> The recommendation for the introduction of community schools led to the establishment of the first and only school of its kind at Debre Berhan until the post-Imperial era. Although since 1975 there has been a growing awareness of the need for community schools, both funds and enthusiasm have yet to be secured.

<sup>27</sup> Teshome Wagaw, *Education in Ethiopia*, p. 106.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> George Lipsky, *Ethiopia*, p. 98.

<sup>30</sup> Ole-Christian Bjerkan, *Plans, Targets and Trends in Ethiopian Education*, Table 17: Enrollment at all levels in Government Schools, 1952-53 up to 1967-68, p. 169.

<sup>31</sup> Mulugeta Wedajo, "Postwar Reform in Ethiopian Education," *Comparative Education Review*, 2:3 (1959) 24-30, p. 27. Concerning the curriculum the author wrote: "This is in a sense to be expected since many of the teachers above fourth grade are foreigners and almost all textbooks are from abroad."

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>33</sup> The idea of a conference originated at UNESCO's eleventh General Conference. With UNESCO's logistical and technical support the African Ministers of Education approved a target where universal primary enrollment was to be achieved by 1980.

<sup>34</sup> Ole-Christian Bjerkan, *Plans, Targets and Trends in Ethiopian Education*, p. 126. According to the conference resolution Ethiopia was expected to provide universal primary education by 1981. The country was expected to provide secondary schools places for 23 per cent of the 15 to 19 year age group. For further details, see Ole-Christian Bjerkan, p. 125. The objectives of the Addis Ababa plan were based on two assumptions. The first was an implicit recognition of the marginal attention paid by the former colonial powers to education. The second assumption was the belief that rapid expansion of universal education was conducive for development.

<sup>35</sup> From 1963 onwards the budget for education fell below 10 per cent of the total expenditure. See Ole-Christian Bjerkan, *Plans, Targets and Trends in Ethiopian Education*, p. 150.

World Bank loans began in 1966. The First Education Project signed in 1966 and completed in 1972, assisted in the expansion of secondary, technical and teacher education, and in the diversification of curricula at various levels. The Second Education Project signed in 1971 and completed in 1979, helped teacher and agricultural education, with a modest expansion of secondary education to improve geographical distribution and quality. The Third Education Project, signed in 1973 and completed in 1980, provided assistance to rural education, science facilities at Addis Ababa University, and production of textbooks and instructional materials. The Fourth Education Project, signed in 1975 and completed in 1981, assisted in the expansion of basic and nonformal education, the training of specialized rural development personnel, and the consolidation of social science facilities at Addis Ababa University. The Fifth Education Project, signed in 1981 and completed in 1986, provided for basic and secondary education facilities, improved quality and relevance of education, and the training of higher level manpower in veterinary medicine. The Sixth Education Project signed in 1984 was designed to improve quality and equity in the education system, particularly at the primary and secondary levels, and in teacher training. The Seventh Education Project was being negotiated in the beginning of 1988. In all

nearly two hundred million US dollars have been invested by the World Bank in Ethiopian education since 1966.

The above information is derived from The World Bank: *Staff Appraisal Report on Ethiopia*, December 8, 1987, p. 13. Since the 1960's about one third of Ethiopian educational expenditure has been financed through foreign loans and assistance. See Assefa Bekele, "The Educational Framework of Economic Development in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia Observer*, 9:1 (1967) 49-58, p. 53.

<sup>36</sup> For enrollment up to 1967-68, see Ole-Christian Bjerkan, *Plans, Targets and Trends in Ethiopian Education*, p. 170. For the 1974-75 figures see Central Statistical Office, Peoples Democratic Republic Of Ethiopia: *Facts and Figures*, Addis Ababa, 1987, p. 106.

<sup>37</sup> Desta Asayehegn, *Schooling for Alienation: The Ethiopian Experience*, International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO, Paris, 1979, p. 71.

<sup>38</sup> Prior to 1963 there was no uniformity regarding the medium of instruction. In private and mission schools all subjects except Amharic were taught in English or French from grade four; from grade five in government schools. See Edward Jandy, "The New Ethiopia and Socioeducational Problems," p. 120. See also George Lipsky, *Ethiopia*, p. 93.

<sup>39</sup> The change of the structure as well as the introduction of a new curriculum was a result of a pilot project initiated in 1958. For a detailed description of the project and the origins of the curriculum, see Maaza Bekele, *A Study of Modern Education in Ethiopia*, pp. 206-211.

<sup>40</sup> The major problems dealt with the shortage of teaching materials. Some subjects had no textbooks at all, not even a teacher's manual, while for other subjects there was an extreme shortage of textbooks. See Teshome Wagaw, *Education in Ethiopia*, p. 158.

<sup>41</sup> In 1965 it was estimated that out of 1070 secondary teachers only 424 were Ethiopians. The rest were foreigners of whom ca. 300 were Peace Corps volunteers from the United States. Most of the Ethiopians were engaged in teaching sports, home economics and handicrafts. See Teshome Wagaw, *Education in Ethiopia*, p. 163.

<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Education, *Secondary School Curriculum; the Current Operation of the Education System*, Addis Ababa, 1966.

<sup>43</sup> In 1974, 70 out of 124 secondary schools were located in Addis Ababa, Shoa province and Asmara. See Central Statistical Office, Peoples Democratic Republic, *Facts and Figures*, Addis Ababa, 1987, p. 107.

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion on the attitudes of Addis Ababa University students towards their country, see chapter three. See also the remarkable study by Beyene Negewo, *The Impact of University Education on the Formation of Political Attitudes of Ethiopia*, Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1977.

<sup>45</sup> The World Bank agreed in 1971 to finance the carrying out of the sector review as well as for the supply of the required expertise. *The Education Sector Review* is summarized and interpreted with a good deal of nostalgia by one of its members, Teshome Wagaw in his book, *Education in Ethiopia*, pp. 184-195.

<sup>46</sup> Ministry of Education, *Education. A Challenge to the Nation. A Report of the Education Sector Review*, Addis Ababa, August, 1972.

<sup>47</sup> Alternative two envisaged the establishment of a non-formal educational network for drop-outs and to some extent for adults. It also envisaged great changes in the curriculum.

<sup>48</sup> Only 65 per cent of the primary school age population would attend school if alternative one were to be implemented.

<sup>49</sup> Teshome Wagaw wrote that the final *Education Sector Review* document was classified as secret and that teachers and parents were hardly informed about it. See his *Education in Ethiopia*, p. 194.

<sup>50</sup> Ministry of Education, *Education and Economic Development in Socialist Ethiopia*. Country Paper prepared for the Conference of the Ministers of Education and those responsible for Economic Planning of African Member States, Addis Ababa, May, 1982, pp. 5-8.

<sup>51</sup> For the 1959-60 figures, see Ole-Christian Bjerkan, *Plans, Targets and Trends in Ethiopian Education*, p. 169. For slightly varying figures, see the article in *Ethiopia Observer*, 5:1 (1961) 61-73, p. 61. The figures for the latter period are derived from *Basic Education Statistics*, published by the Ministry of Education in 1989.

<sup>52</sup> Ministry of Education, *General Directives of Ethiopian Education*, Addis Ababa, 1980, vol. 1., p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid..

<sup>54</sup> This problem has been pointed out in a Canadian study completed in 1988 but unpublished.

<sup>55</sup> Ministry of Education, *Objectives and Directives of Ethiopian Education*, vol. 1, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., vol. 5 p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> The extent to which the planners within the Ministry of Education were detached from reality can be seen from the fact that by 1988 only 20 per cent of the primary school age population attended school. The country has no financial resources to provide eight years of primary education for every child in the primary school age group. The study by Dawit Getachew shows clearly that the economic base could at best provide primary education for about 20 per cent of this age group. See Dawit Getachew, "Population Growth and the Demand for Education in Ethiopia," Paper read to the *National Conference on Population Issues in Ethiopia's National Development*, Addis Ababa, July, 1989.

<sup>58</sup> See Dawit Getachew, *ibid.*, p. 5; The World Bank, *Staff Appraisal Report on Ethiopia*, Washington, 1987, p. 49.

## The Education System in Ethiopia: Official Views

In 1983 the government passed a resolution calling for a review of the education sector. In motivating the resolution the government noted:

the formal education sector expanded rapidly after the Revolution, but the fact that there are some weaknesses in the quality of Education must now be recognised. The content and quality of education must fully prepare students to meet the objective demands of the nation and the ideological needs of our society.

Steps should be taken without delay to implement the programme for expansion of technical and vocational education in line with the manpower demands of the country.<sup>1</sup>

The resolution called for the identification of the causes of decline and strongly recommended that the planning and implementation of education reflect the objective realities, as well as the ideological orientation, of the country.

Soon after the passing of the resolution, the Ministry of Education initiated a project known as *The Evaluative Research on the General Education System of Ethiopia* (Ergese).

### *General description of the Ergese project*

The Ergese documents that we are going to analyse are official in the sense that they reflect the views of the policy makers within the Ministry of Education and the government. These documents are, however, classified as secret and, therefore, have been inaccessible to the public. Permission to study the documents is granted on an individual basis and with the personal authorization by the Minister of Education.

Ergese had four workshops staffed by educational experts from the Ministry of Education and Addis Ababa University. Each workshop had an average of fifteen experts.<sup>2</sup> The workshops were responsible to an executive committee chaired by the Minister of Education. At a higher level, the smooth functioning of the project was supervised by a coordinating committee composed of the Minister of Education, the

Commissioner for Higher Education, the Commissioner for Science and Technology, the President of Addis Ababa University, and a representative of the Ideological Department of the Workers Party of Ethiopia.

Each workshop produced two volumes - a technical report and a summary of findings. The summaries of all the workshops were then put together into a separate volume with the title *The Evaluative Research of the General Education System in Ethiopia*. The recommendations were further collected into a final volume. This volume, henceforth designated as Volume 10, was expected to lay down the basis for improving the educational system. This final document was divided into recommendations that could be implemented by the MOE and those that could only be tackled by the state. A brief summary of the entire project and its findings was published in English in May 1986, a volume expressly intended for international organizations such as *SIDA*, *UNICEF*, *WORLD BANK*, all of which have been involved in Ethiopian Education.<sup>3</sup>

The Ergese project - carried out by Ethiopian expertise - demonstrates effectively the know-how and competence still available in the country. The project was designed and conducted, and the report written, between 1983 and 1986. Although the project suffered from some technical constraints, such as lack of skilled manpower in methods of evaluation and technological means for data analysis, on the whole it is an admirable work.

In the following pages I shall discuss the findings and comment on: i) curriculum development and the teaching-learning process; ii) the findings of the remaining workshops; and iii) the general recommendations.

### *Ergese findings on curriculum development and on the teaching-learning process*

The first forty pages of the report deal with the general role of education in social development. The views expressed are partly controversial and many of them out-of-date. Most interesting are the objectives of the workshop: i) to examine the degree of integration of each subject with the national educational objectives; ii) to analyse student textbooks with the aim of understanding their integration (content and clarity) with the national objectives; iii) to assess the impact of time allocation, language of instruction, and the material delivery system on educational objectives; iv) to look into the factors affecting students' reception of education; v) to examine teachers'

attitudes to their profession; vi) to assess inputs and attitudes of parents; and finally, vii) to assess the teaching-learning process. For these purposes many kinds of questionnaires were prepared and administered to students, teachers, parents, and school officials.

A basic underlying assumption shared by both policy makers and the MOE is the conviction that education holds the key to the nation's economic and social development. If we were to look for a slogan that would capture this conviction, it could be expressed as follows: spread education as much as possible and the nation's economic and social development problems will take care of themselves. The type of education that is to be promoted has been defined by its intended result. This was clearly expressed at the founding congress of The Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in 1984. I quote:

The fundamental aim of education in our country today is to cultivate Marxist-Leninist Ideology in the young generation, to develop knowledge in science and technology, in the new culture and the arts, and to integrate and coordinate research with production to enable the Revolution to move forward and secure productive citizens.<sup>4</sup>

The aims of Ethiopia's socialist education has its roots in the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution of 1976, and in the *Objectives and Directives of Ethiopian Education* (five volumes) produced in 1980 by the MOE. It is indeed very surprising that the 1980 documents were not consulted by the Ergese workshops, and therefore, a great deal of experience was lost. Many Ergese recommendations in fact had already been accepted by the Ministry of Education and were, therefore, repetitious.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Preparation of subject syllabus*

The workshop's aim with the analysis of syllabi was to assess the extent to which class subjects reflected national educational objectives. For this purpose all the textbooks used from grades one to twelve were examined. Each subject syllabus was put on a grade scale where three points were assigned to a subject syllabus if it reflected fully the national objective.<sup>6</sup>

The workshop did not analyse the syllabus but rather limited itself only to the preparation of a questionnaire and the analysis of data derived from replies to the questionnaire. The actual task of textbook evaluation was carried out by the teachers themselves. On the basis of

such replies the workshop concluded that, on the whole, the syllabi of secondary school subjects reflected the national objectives.

The first comment that can be drawn from the data analysed by the workshop is that the syllabi of Ethiopian schools reflect the national objectives of education. The implications are that this aspect of the educational problem does not demand a drastic or substantial reform. However, as a historian and as a potential teacher, I believe strongly that the objectives of the subject that I know very closely do not in any way reflect the national objectives. This issue will be addressed in some detail in the next chapter.

#### *Quality of presentation of individual subjects*

As far we can understand from the report, the workshop appears to have analysed only the contents and the style of presentation of contents. With the exception of one subject (agriculture), the remaining subjects suffer either from lack of clarity, coherence, and consistency of content or from poor style of presentation. Notwithstanding my reservations on the evaluation method adopted by the workshop, the conclusions of the workshop confirm my own impression of the school textbook situation. History for secondary school students, for instance, was rated as one of the most poorly organized subjects, scoring 2.1 out of three possible points for contents and 1.6 out of three for style of presentation.

It would be interesting to know how the workshop arrived at assigning such specific and seemingly accurate figures for each subject. However, what emanates from the report is that, what is judged is not really the content as such but the composition of the content and the presentation of the content with a view to the teaching-learning process. In other words, the workshop was not so much interested in what is being taught, but in the manner in which the subject matter is composed and presented to students. The pedagogical aspects of the subjects are judged rather than the relevance and appropriateness of the content.

Such method of evaluation is no doubt important, but it needs to be pointed out that it represents only one aspect of evaluation. An aspect of quality evaluation that the workshop did not consider will be illustrated briefly. History textbooks for grades eleven and twelve are direct translations of a Russian book. According to Ergese units of measurement, emphasis was placed on i) choice of content; ii) internal integration of content; and iii) expression of content. In the second category, measurement units dealt with the distribution of exercises,

pictorial illustrations and style of language. From Ergese's summary conclusions it is virtually impossible to pinpoint the exact weaknesses of the textbooks, partly due to the fact that the units of measurement are far too numerous. The reasons for the low ranking of history textbooks could be due to a number of technical and pedagogical aspects which may have little relevance for the question: what ought to be taught as history in grades eleven and twelve? It is this dimension that the workshop has not dealt with.

#### *Language of instruction*

Concerning the impact of the language of instruction on quality, the workshop found that in the first six grades Amharic has created difficulties for students whose mother tongue is not Amharic. To the extent that beginning school life in a language other than the student's mother tongue creates adjustment problems could be well foreseen, the conclusion of the workshop is no revelation. What I had found rather striking, however, was the sweeping and general approach that the workshop applied to dealing with such major policy matters.

Apart from the fact that there are wide discrepancies between the report of this workshop and the summary report as to how many were asked to comment on the negative impact of the medium of instruction, the workshop did not attempt to penetrate into the nature of the difficulties that students encounter.<sup>7</sup> Do students in grade six have the same problems with Amharic as those in grades one and two? How do teachers confront the problem of language when dealing with first and second graders? To what extent do they use the mother tongue of their students for purposes of explanation? It is a well-known fact that languages other than Amharic are informally used throughout the elementary and secondary school system.

The workshop also discovered that the overwhelming majority of secondary teachers stated that using the English language as a medium of instruction created great difficulties both for themselves as well as for their students. From grade seven onward all subjects are taught in English. The switch from grade six where Amharic is used to the use of English in grade seven is very drastic. Unlike the decade of the 1960's and the early 1970's, when most of the secondary school teachers were native speakers of English, thus facilitating the consolidation of English as the medium of instruction, since the Revolution of 1974 there are virtually no expatriate secondary school teachers. Apart from the fact that the English language competence of teachers has declined

markedly during the past fifteen years, elementary school instruction in English is in a far poorer state than in the pre-Revolution period.

#### *Students' attitudes to education and the problems they encounter*

As in the previous section, this problem area is also introduced with general principles. Students, it is stated, should follow their studies diligently and at the end show that they have acquired knowledge, professional competence, and a change of attitude. For education to achieve its goal, there are prerequisites that students ought to meet. Some of these deal with the culture that students bring to school from their homes, treatment at home, attitudes towards education and the teaching profession, discipline at home as well as in school, their inclination to addiction (drugs, alcohol, smoking, etc.) or the absence thereof, and their pattern of spending free time. These preconditions, the workshop believed, are important factors in the students' potential receptiveness for education. The objective of this section was, as the workshop put it, to throw light on the make-up of Ethiopian students.

Asked to answer the question of why students desire education, 65 per cent of 2,345 secondary students replied that they wanted to acquire knowledge. Only four per cent stated that they wanted education in order to get a job.<sup>8</sup> Notwithstanding the reservations that could be made regarding the questionnaire, some conclusions may be drawn. Firstly, it appears that secondary education is not understood as the maximum education that the greatest majority of the students would have access to. Therefore, the failure among students to regard secondary education as a step to the world of labour says much about the entire educational system.

Secondly, the result of the questionnaire makes it clear that the objectives of educational policy, i.e., to use secondary education to train middle level qualified manpower for the needs of the country, have yet to penetrate into the thinking of the students. The gap between educational objectives and school realities seems to be very wide. Objections could certainly be raised against these comments. It could be argued that the desire to acquire knowledge is not contradictory to putting such knowledge into practice in the labour market. Indeed, it is not. But if for one moment we assume that the questionnaire was very well thought-out and correctly administered, it ought to have reflected that the reason for seeking knowledge lies in the utilization of such knowledge in the world of work. A close look at the result of the questionnaire reveals that students were asked to choose only one out of seven reasons for going to school. If the



questionnaire had been administered in a slightly different way, i.e., to rank the reasons for going to school, then the result would have been different and more interesting. We know that there is more than one reason why we go to school.

To further assess the interest of students in education, the workshop turned to the teachers. In the first questionnaire teachers were asked to evaluate student interest on a grade scale composed of high, average, and low. Out of 1,123 secondary school teachers asked, about 20 per cent stated that students have a high interest, while about 50 per cent put student interest as average. The rest stated that students exhibited a low level of interest. In the second questionnaire teachers were asked to rank the efforts students make to learn. The results were very similar.

However, a markedly different opinion was found regarding the level of interest when the above-mentioned questionnaire was administered to school officials. Among those asked the majority expressed the opinion that students have either low or very low motivation for education.

A few tentative conclusions can be drawn. Although a considerable number of teachers expressed the opinion that students have either low or very low motivation, it appears encouraging to find that more than 60 per cent still believe that students are sufficiently motivated. This conclusion may be drawn with the reservation that the questionnaire was administered properly and that it was regarded both by interviewers and interviewees as an important and serious research instrument.

Teachers were further asked their opinion on the causes of low interest in education among students. The answers were indeed revealing. Out of 943 secondary teachers asked, nearly 40 per cent were of the opinion that the main cause was lack of parental guidance. Nearly 50 per cent of the teachers expressed the view that students lack a clear understanding of why they go to school. About 10 per cent stated that the main cause was insufficient teacher control.

Here it would have been interesting to know the circumstances under which the teachers filled in the questionnaire. Were the teachers asked to put a cross on one of the pre-stated variables: i) lack of parental control; ii) lack of knowledge as to why students go to school; and, iii) due to teachers' lack of control? Or did the workshop simply pose the question: what are the factors contributing to the low input by students? If the teachers were asked to choose one of the variables set by the workshop, then the result could best be described as the

verification of the assumptions of the workshop rather than as the opinions of the teachers.

However, if we assume that teachers were given a free hand to put down factors affecting students' input, we cannot avoid drawing some important conclusions: namely, either the teachers did not give sufficient time and thought to answer the questionnaire, or they felt that it was beyond their competence to express their opinion on such matters. The main reason for drawing such a blunt conclusion is my firm belief that the overriding factor producing low input for education among students is their perception of the future after completion of their studies. Students know fully well that their chances for university education are extremely small and for job opportunities even smaller. Studying under these circumstances, it is no wonder that students have very little interest in education. These issues are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

### *Living conditions of students*

Convinced of the existence of a causal relationship between living conditions and school performance, the workshop designed a number of questions aimed at mapping the picture. For this purpose nearly 3,500 students were interviewed concerning their health, living conditions, and the size of their families. The findings of the interviews on student health were indeed alarming. Nearly twenty per cent of those students asked had serious problems of either seeing, or hearing, or other physical handicaps. An astonishing 37 per cent of respondents were living with people outside their families. On the assumption that students living in small families have a better chance of gaining parental attention, the questionnaire designed for this purpose came to the conclusion that of the 3,352 asked, only eight per cent belonged to families with three members or less. 23 per cent came from families that had between three and five members, and 35 per cent from families having six to eight members. What was rather striking from this questionnaire was that students who came from large families (nine members and more) made up 33 per cent.

Concerning the nutritional situation of the students, the questionnaire's result showed that a considerable but unspecified number of students had no possibility of eating three meals a day. The workshop pointed to the impact of nutrition on performance and therefore on quality. One of its recommendations called for the establishment of school lunches for needy students.

*Lack of classroom discipline and other external factors affecting the learning-teaching process*

Of 3,601 secondary students, 47 per cent were of the opinion that classroom discipline was maintained, while 52 per cent believed the contrary was true. To ask whether class discipline is maintained or not is to beg the question as long as the components of class discipline are not defined. Nevertheless, when asked for their opinions on what affects class discipline, their answers were as follows. Thirty per cent were of the opinion that lack of discipline was caused by the teachers' failure to impose order. Twenty per cent stated that students were the main causes of class disturbances, and another 20 per cent put the cause as arising from frustrations connected with their inability to follow the teaching-learning process. Finally about 20 per cent felt that the main cause was due to the huge number of students in the classes.

Teachers, school directors, and school officials had a markedly different understanding of school and class discipline. About 25 per cent of the secondary teachers stated that class discipline was poorly maintained, a view not fully shared by school officials. More than 80 per cent of school directors and more than 90 per cent of unit leaders were of the opinion that class discipline was maintained to their satisfaction. Given the circumstances under which education is conducted, it is indeed remarkable that the school and the teaching staff have succeeded in maintaining such a high level of discipline.

*Teachers' attitudes to their profession and the problems they encounter in the course of carrying out their duties*

The central issue in this section was to assess teachers' attitudes to their profession and to draw some conclusions on the impact of these attitudes on the teaching-learning process. The point of departure was a rather well-known phenomenon: firstly, public employees are assigned to their positions by the Central Planning Commission and, secondly, public employees have extremely restricted rights to change their professions. The exact percentage of those teachers who joined their profession unwillingly, either due to assignment by the government or other circumstances, may be difficult to ascertain and may not be worth the effort. What is important is that more than fifty per cent of the secondary teachers would prefer to be engaged in professions other than teaching. They feel that they are stuck in a profession that they do not appreciate and therefore lack commitment. The workshop draws a conclusion with which I concur, when it states that such a large number of teachers who lack commitment to their

profession is bound to affect the quality of education.<sup>9</sup>

Asked about their attitudes towards the profession, slightly over twenty per cent of the secondary teachers answered that they were unhappy due to their low salaries. Over forty per cent were of the opinion that society at large has a low opinion of the teaching profession. Although the workshop did not draw any conclusion based on the above findings, it seems pertinent to point out that teachers' lack of commitment is not as much concerned with the salary scale, as with teachers' perception of how the society views them and their profession.

Instead of pursuing the line of enquiry provided by the teachers, the workshop limited itself to the opinions of society regarding teachers' living standards. The obvious conclusion was that over seventy per cent of those asked stated that teachers enjoy an average living standard. This entire exercise ought to have been qualified, because the rating of a living standard into high, average, and low is of limited value as long as concrete information as to what is meant by high, average, and low was lacking. If teachers' living standards (based on salary scale) are compared with the national income per capita, then teachers indeed enjoy an extremely high standard. But that is not what was intended by the designers of the questionnaires nor by the teachers themselves. When secondary teachers indicated that society has a low opinion of their profession, they were not referring to their living standards.

The question as to why secondary teachers believe that their profession is judged as having low status has remained unanswered. This I believe is largely due to the fact that the workshop was not organized to deal with unforeseen issues that could and most often did arise from the questionnaires. When secondary teachers pointed out how society perceived the teaching profession, they were indicating a very serious problem related to the relationship between school and society. In view of the government's stated policy and conviction that education holds the key to social, economic and political development, the problem indicated by teachers deserves serious comment. The workshop, however, virtually dismissed it as an anomaly.

Far more attention, on the other hand, was devoted to students' attitudes towards the weaknesses of teachers. 907 students were asked to respond with either yes or no to a series of questions on the basis of which an elaborate table was designed.

It is very difficult to know how many students were actually questioned because the questions were divided into groups and administered by several research assistants. To cite one example: the question of whether teachers respect the lesson period was asked of

807 students, whereas the question on whether teachers encourage student participation in the class-room was answered by only 330 students. Altogether, however, a couple thousand students answered several of the 19 detailed questions designed by the workshop in its attempt to assess student opinions of their teachers and of the teaching-learning process.

The allegations of students are indeed very grave and serious. While, on the one hand, it is commendable on the part of the workshop to treat student opinions very seriously, a great deal of caution is required before one can draw tangible conclusions. On the conviction that student opinions are very important (as they are the recipients of education), the workshop accepted the student verdict and drew the conclusion that the weaknesses which the students pointed out could be attributed to the lack of competence of teachers in methods and subject matter.

Such a conclusion constitutes, however, only a part of the truth. If, as the workshop believes, the problems pointed out by students could be solved by more retraining of teachers, then the educational problem would remain only a technical one. The key to the problem would have been discovered. If we were to put it schematically, it could be expressed as follows: retrain the teachers in modern teaching methods and upgrade their competence in the subjects they teach and then students would not complain. This is not only to simplify and minimize the problem, but also to miss the central issue in the current Ethiopian educational crisis.

The workshop devoted a great deal of effort to the preparation of a detailed questionnaire for students on whether teachers accomplish their duties. This is fine. The problem arises when the workshop fails to try to find out the attitudes of teachers towards their working conditions, their students, and the system of education they are expected to implement. Whereas teachers are asked simply to answer questions as to whether discipline is respected in the classroom, students were asked to respond to very detailed questions.

The workshop missed an opportunity for learning about the educational system as daily experienced by teachers. Although it would be unfair to accuse the Curriculum and Teaching-Learning Workshop of designing detailed questionnaires on areas closely related only to its field of competence, teachers' attitudes were neglected, and the lessons that could have been gained were lost.

Research based largely on data assembled through questionnaires has many pitfalls unless due allowance is made for the possibilities of checking and cross-checking the assembled data through in-depth

research into the major areas of the problem under study. The Eregese research suffers greatly from the fact that it was largely based on questionnaires prepared before hand and that it did not give itself the necessary time to analyse closely the assembled data. This can be seen in virtually every compiled table. I shall take one instance for purposes of illustration. In contrast to an earlier table, where students rated teachers and the learning process negatively, their answers to slightly different but essentially similar questions illustrate clearly the problem of data analysis.

It is once again difficult to draw concrete conclusions from such a table due to the fact that the variable "sometimes" is too vague. What does "sometimes" mean as used by students? Does it mean once a week, a month or a term? The only way to get something out of such an elaborately prepared statistical table is through an in-depth study in the life-cycle of a classroom. Nevertheless, on the basis of such response the Eregese workshop concluded that there was a healthy relationship between teachers and students. Such a conclusion contradicts many of the students' opinions listed in the earlier table.

Among the problems that teachers encounter, the Eregese workshop chose to concentrate on i) teaching load, ii) problems related to the teaching and learning process, and iii) use of free time. Through a questionnaire designed to map out the teaching load, the workshop found that 92 per cent had a load of up to thirty periods per week, while the remaining had a load exceeding thirty periods. The workshop noted that a teaching load exceeding thirty periods could affect the teaching-learning process, as there would be little time left for teachers to prepare lessons. They thus recommended that the matter be given serious consideration.

The approach of the workshop to the problem of teaching load is a further illustration of both the methodological weakness and the apparent simplification of some aspects of the educational system: i.e., the role of teachers. The workshop's sympathy with the teachers work load that exceeds thirty periods is of limited value, because compared to other problems, the teaching load is a minor one. The problem that jeopardizes the teaching-learning process most is rather the extremely large classes.

Unless the problem of overcrowded classes is confronted, the reduction of the teaching load would not produce positive results. For the purpose of clarification let us assume that the load of a history teacher in grade nine is reduced from thirty to twenty periods. Indeed the teacher would be greatly relieved because he or she would be teaching ten classes instead of fifteen. However, even in this new



programme, the history teacher has to take care of ten classes totalling between 650 and 900 students. The ten periods per week reduction of the teaching load (slightly over an hour per day) would not be of great help because the teacher's problem (i.e., far too many students for a teacher to reasonably cope with) has very little to do with his/her teaching load counted in numbers of periods.

I strongly believe that secondary teachers would willingly teach thirty-five periods or more if they had smaller classes. The teacher's full working day is currently either from 8 a.m. to 12 noon or from 12:30 p.m. to 16:30 p.m. In other words, teachers have enough time to prepare their lessons but far less time to communicate with their students.

The Ergese workshop would certainly have shifted its emphasis from the problem of teaching load in terms of number of classes to the problem of overcrowding if it had made an effort to follow a few teachers at work through for about a week. The working week of history teachers for grades nine and ten in the schools I visited was not more than thirty periods. In other words, their teaching load falls within the limits accepted by Ergese. Since history is taught twice a week, it meant that history teachers were responsible for up to fifteen classes. The average number of students in each class being between 65 and 90, a history teacher in grade ten usually has over 1000 students in his or her charge. Clearly, the main problem does not lie in the number of periods but in the number of students for whom the teacher is responsible. We shall return to this problem later.

The workshop's main objective was not to find out what kind of problems were encountered, but to discover to what extent certain well-defined problems were encountered by teachers. This was most certainly why some problems were not mentioned. Teachers were asked to either agree or disagree with the variables that the Ergese workshop had already defined. The problems of the teachers that Ergese workshop wanted to communicate with the outside world dealt with i) shortage of books, ii) shortage of time to cover course contents, iii) poor structure for the development and production of audiovisual materials, and iv) lack of teacher manuals. Overcrowding, lack of discipline, and lack of motivation were not included.

In a survey of relations between parents and the school, where about 900 teachers were interviewed, the majority of the teachers asked were of the opinion that they had little contact with parents. According to the teachers, the main problems are the failure of the school to create a conducive environment and teachers' skepticism concerning the relevance of teacher-parent contacts. On the basis of such replies, the

workshop reached the conclusion that the lack of contacts between teachers and parents must affect the quality of education.

As is typical of the procedure of the workshop, the problem of contacts between teachers and parents is treated as a finished event, though the result of the questionnaire pointed out other directions. The majority of the teachers expressed the opinion that the school did not create an environment conducive to teacher-parent contacts. A workshop that assumes both the responsibility for exhaustive treatment and for pointing out the direction for the future ought to have taken the time to find out more about what teachers meant by the lack of conducive environment. The recommendations of the workshop would have been more substantial and concrete if an effort had been made through a follow-up questionnaire to probe the general responses given by the teachers.

One of the factors adversely affecting the teaching-learning process, and thereby the quality of education, was the living conditions of students and teachers. The workshop found that society (urban dwellers associations) does very little to provide accommodations for needy students and teachers. The workshop was also of the opinion that the lack of involvement of parents in the day-to-day life of the school and in the conditions of students negatively affects the teaching-learning process and consequently the quality of education. The workshop does little more than note the impact of lack of parental participation. It makes no suggestions as to how this problem could be confronted. As we shall discuss later, the workshop wrongly places the responsibility on parents.

### *Teaching methods*

"It is clear," wrote the workshop, "that today in our country one of the factors that adversely affect the quality of education is the teaching method used by teachers."<sup>10</sup> By teaching methods the workshop meant i) lecture, ii) demonstrative system, iii) the Socratic system, iv) dialogue or discussion, v) argumentation, and vi) teaching through practice. To the surprise of the workshop, the result of the questionnaire designed to find out the methods used by teachers showed that teachers were acquainted with all the methods mentioned.

### *Ergese summary report and recommendations*

The Ergese summary report contains the findings of the four workshops.<sup>11</sup> Most of these findings are further elaborated in a

separate volume with recommendations of three types: those designed for implementation by the MOE, by the society, and by the state.<sup>12</sup> In the following paragraphs I shall outline and briefly comment on the findings and recommendations with the view to assessing the contributions of Ergese to our knowledge of the problems of Ethiopian education.

The summary report begins by pointing out the bottlenecks that affect the quality of education. Classes throughout the country are cancelled without good reasons. The number of students has greatly expanded, thus creating a serious shortage of classrooms. There is a great shortage of school instruments, beginning with the components for laboratories and textbooks. The competence of teachers leaves a great deal to be desired, and this problem becomes even more serious in periods where the number of students has greatly increased. Student ambitions are judged to be very low. Many reasons are given both for low motivation and for very high drop-out rates in the first and sixth grades. Both teachers and students concentrate on the exam rather than on the acquisition and retention of knowledge. The stages of the education ladder, i.e. primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary are not satisfactorily integrated and coordinated. And finally, the gap between theory and practice is too wide due to the problem of the lack of physical space in schools.

The Ergese authors seem to put most of the responsibility for the decline of education on the shoulders of teachers. They argue that far too many teachers who lack competence both in teaching methods and in subject matter are engaged in secondary school teaching. Therefore, according to Ergese authors, "the most serious problem in secondary education is the fact that teachers who lack competence are engaged with teaching responsibilities."<sup>13</sup> The authors point out that in grades nine and ten, more than half of the teachers do not meet the academic requirements, i.e., do not possess university degrees. The authors also pointed out that the recruitment of qualified teachers to secondary schools did not seem to proceed according to the *Objectives and Directives of Ethiopian Education* developed by the Ministry of Education in 1980.<sup>14</sup>

No one can disagree with the need for a constant effort to provide qualified staff. However, a problem arises when qualification is judged solely on formal grounds and when one attempts to draw sweeping conclusions regarding the impact of the presence of unqualified teachers on the quality of education. I believe that the Ergese authors have greatly misplaced and misunderstood the issue, when they argue that the presence of unqualified teachers is the most serious problem.

The Ergese authors associate teacher competence with the possession of formal qualifications. However, whether a teacher is competent or not is a matter that ought to be decided in the classroom. A possession of formal qualification is hardly evidence that its possessor is competent. Teachers lacking formal qualifications could well be highly competent, if they put enough interest, enthusiasm, and self-acquired knowledge into their work.

Whether those engaged in the teaching profession have sufficient interest in their jobs depends greatly on their working conditions. These conditions encompass teachers salaries, class size, student motivation and the future of students after completion of school. With the current conditions prevailing in Ethiopian schools, the upgrading of teachers' qualification would not bring about a significant improvement in the quality of education. Other problems such as overcrowding, the lack of delivery of instruments and textbooks, and absorption of graduates by the labour market have to be confronted first. These issues are discussed in some detail in the following chapter.

One of the most interesting findings of Ergese is the high percentage of teachers who were compelled by the state to join the teaching profession. The Ergese authors quite rightly pointed out that the presence of such a high percentage of teachers who lack commitment to their profession must affect the quality of education. The Ergese authors recommended teacher recruitment on a voluntary basis with the implication that the Ministry of Education should compete with other public and private enterprises to keep the best teachers in the schools.<sup>15</sup>

Continuing its summary of the school environment, the Ergese report noted that 83 per cent of the schools have no access to agricultural plots, thus turning the main objective, i.e., education for production, into a purely theoretical exercise. It is, as we shall discuss later, very controversial to entrust the formal education sector with such a heavy responsibility of educating students for production. But to continue to expect the realization or the implementation of the objective, "education for production," without first fulfilling the minimum requirements, amounts to viewing the school as a miracle performing institution.

The consideration of the problems facing Ethiopian schools from the dimension of infrastructure continued with a discussion of classroom conditions. The Ergese report found that over 50 per cent of the classrooms were overcrowded and had insufficient lighting and ventilation. The question of overcrowding has not been studied sufficiently by Ergese. It is not clear what the Ergese authors mean

with overcrowding. However, from the context we can surmise that they refer to classes which contain more students than were earlier intended. To the extent that the average teacher-student ratio stands at 1:62 in primary schools, 1:52 in junior secondary, and 1:37 in secondary, it can be said that every classroom in Ethiopia is overcrowded.

One consequence of overcrowding is the shortage of laboratory equipment. The Ergese report noted that laboratories could not accommodate all students in a class with the result that the labs were rarely used. Another serious problem that the Ergese authors noted was the vicious circle created by the shortage of instruments and made worse by overcrowding. According to the guidelines of the Ministry of Education, the class size for a course known as Production Technology was 24 students. However, the Ergese researchers found out that as many as 120 students were trying to follow a teaching class designed for only 24. The shortage of instruments, severe as it is for the student population specified by the Ministry of Education, can be appreciated when such courses are taught to five times the original class size. The chaotic situation is further worsened by the fact that secondary teachers have no teaching manuals other than the textbooks.<sup>16</sup>

The situation of teachers is once again discussed, although not on the basis of the interviews and questionnaires, but from an appraisal of the current situation. The Ergese authors express the opinion that the working conditions of teachers are poor. They cite as examples the series of difficulties that teachers face concerning accommodations, health care, teaching load, and their obligations to society. Moreover, the quality of their performance is affected by a lack of sufficient training, which, in turn, is caused by the general poverty of the country. The Ergese authors also pointed out that teachers and the teaching profession are not appreciated by their surroundings.

For the first time, Ergese authors discuss an issue of educational planning as a finding, although they made no attempt to confront it empirically. They write that: "the expansion of the educational system is not in accordance with the economic resource capability of the state."<sup>17</sup> Nowhere do they explain what they really mean by this statement. It is not clear at all if they are expressing disappointment at the fact that the education sector has not expanded enough because of the limited resource capability of the state. The balance between resources for education and the number of students in school is one of the central problems affecting quality of education. In the Ethiopian case, as we shall argue later, one of the most important factors that brought the crisis of education to the fore is, on the one hand, the

desire of the state to expand the educational system and, on the other hand, the inability of the state to provide adequate financing for the proper implementation of the education programme.

The Ergese authors were apparently not aware of this connection. On the contrary, it appears that the Ergese calls for further expansion of education when they point out the uneven distribution of education. Their call for the abolition of the national examination at grade six and for eight years of free and universal education indeed indicate that Ergese authors are in favour of the expansion of education.

In fairness it should be mentioned that Ergese pointed out the need for the reduction of class size from the present teacher-student ratio of 1:50 to 1:40 in secondary schools, but at the same time they added, the reduction of class size is a process closely connected with the country's stage of development. They expressed a belief that this will improve in due course, although it is bound to take a long time. Until such time, the problem of class size, it was suggested, could be solved primarily by improving teaching methods.

The Ergese authors are of the opinion that teachers could confront the problem of overcrowding by developing the method of assigning students to correct each others homework and by the provision of easily read and understood textbooks. These suggestions are, in my judgement, far from sufficient, even if it can be assumed that teachers would refine their teaching methods and the curriculum department would produce textbooks that could be easily read and understood. These two measures could not in any significant manner solve the problems created by overcrowding, as well as by lack of motivation among students and teachers.

The Ergese report has failed to grasp the nature and dimension of the crisis of Ethiopian education. Its findings are at times of a purely technical nature that largely take care of themselves in due course of time. At other times they are outright contradictory. In one passage they seem to bemoan the uneven distribution of schools and the slow pace of progress towards the realization of eight years universal education. In another passage they call for the reduction of class size – a result of the rapid expansion of education – but fail to point out the consequences of overcrowding on the quality of education. On the contrary they argue that the economic development of the country would eventually solve the problem of overcrowding. Yet in another passage the Ergese authors recommend the extension of a school day from half a day into a full day, without any explanation of how this feat can be accomplished given the limited resources available.

The Ergese authors examined the state of education from the

perspectives of the Curriculum Department and from that of the Ministry of Education. For the Ergese authors the problem of Ethiopian education is a result of poor textbooks, lack of instruments, and widespread incompetency among teaching staff. One gets the impression that the problem of Ethiopian education could be solved through the establishment of extremely expensive educational superstructures for teachers and officials of Ministry of Education. The Ergese project is permeated with the exaggerated belief that, if one trains and re-trains the teachers, the quality of education would improve. This is a very mechanical equation which would hardly operate in reality. No teacher can succeed in motivating students who see no bright future after school. No teacher can make use of all the summer courses, if he or she is obliged to continue to teach big classes and many periods per day.

#### *Ergese recommendations*

The Ergese recommendations are of three types: namely, those for implementation by the MOE, those that could be implemented by public and popular institutions, and finally those recommendations which require the intervention of the state. In the following pages I shall outline and comment on the most important recommendations.

#### *Recommendations for implementation by the Ministry of Education*

One of the most substantial recommendations that Ergese put forward dealt with the training of teachers for primary schools. The Ergese authors pointed out that since teacher trainees are made to follow 17 subjects in one year, they cannot master the programme. Therefore, it was recommended that the teacher training programme be extended to two years. The recommendation is realistic, but the motivation can be debated. Indeed, 17 subjects are far too many to be covered in one year. However, what is even more important is that the knowledge of teaching (pedagogy) cannot be crammed in the students' minds within such a short period of time. It can be argued that even if teacher training were to be extended to two years, it is not certain that students would be able to follow a programme containing 17 subjects. In addition to extending the period of teacher training from one to two years, efforts ought to be made to cut down the number of subjects from 17 to less than ten.

As regards educational planning and implementation, Ergese mentions a number of problems but fails to guide the MOE out of the

predicament. Mention is made of the fact that the rate of expansion of education is greater than the capability of the state to either provide adequate education or employment to those who complete their education. It was also noted that the primary school distribution does not match the national development objectives. Furthermore, mention is made of the growth of primary and secondary schools without plans. The list of observations concludes by pointing out the extremely high teacher-student ratio and the need for substantial changes in the organizational structure of the Ministry of Education. Finally the Ergese report recommended that the expansion of the various educational stages, i.e., the primary and the junior and senior secondary, ought to match the rate of social and economic development in the country. This, according to Ergese, is a recommendation that the Ministry of Education is expected to implement.

The Ministry of Education has, however, neither the capability nor the resources to match distribution of education with the social and economic progress of the country. Moreover, it is far from clear what Ergese meant by social and economic progress. With the current understanding of the role of education, neither the Ministry of Education nor the state needs to worry about matching distribution of education with social and economic progress, since education constitutes the key instrument for social, political and economic growth.

The Ergese recommendation would have made a great deal of sense if it had strongly argued that the budget of 103 million *birr* allocated to secondary education is barely enough to educate even one third of the 326,000 enrolled secondary students.<sup>18</sup> What Ethiopia is experiencing at the present is that the Ministry of Education is defeating its purpose by spreading its greatly limited budget beyond any comprehensible limit.

Concerning curriculum development in teaching-learning process, Ergese noted that, in general, textbooks do not reflect national educational objectives and that most of them pay attention to the teaching rather than learning dimensions. The problem of textbooks is further complicated by the fact that these are written in English – a medium that has created serious problems both for students and teachers. Closely connected with the language of instruction is the additional problem that textbooks are either written or adopted without sufficient consideration of the capability of students to understand them.

In the field of the teaching-learning process, Ergese noted the

failure of teachers to use lesson plans, the weakness of instructional supervision, and the low competence of teachers. Ergese once again restated that society's support for education was minimal and that parents exercise very negligible control over their children with the result that discipline can hardly be maintained in the classroom.

In order to meet the above problems, Ergese recommended that experts at the curriculum department be informed about the results of the Ergese project. It also called for the establishment of a curriculum institute, which would require foreign assistance (aid and loans) to launch. Ergese also emphasized the preparation of textbooks for vocational education, because the Ten Year Development Plan envisages that vocational education ought to match the country's socialist economic orientation and its objective realities by the end of the plan period.<sup>19</sup>

Concerning the problems created by the use of Amharic and English as media of instruction, Ergese called for further study that could be used as the basis for the promulgation of a language policy. In view of the position of the Ministry of Education on the subject, and of the results of investigations carried out by Ergese, the recommendation ought to have been more specific. Ergese could at least have dealt with the frame of reference for the study on the question of the use of English as a medium of instruction.<sup>20</sup>

Coming back to central problems in the teaching-learning process, Ergese expressed the opinion that the main cause was the lack of sufficient training of teachers. Therefore, it recommended that teachers and school officials be provided with professional support services. Ergese further advised that the teacher training system be reorganized in a way that would enable the new structure to eliminate problems related to teaching-learning. It also pointed out the possibilities for the Ministry of Education to seek financial assistance from donor organizations for the purpose of improving teacher training.

Aware of the attitudes of teachers and the status of the teaching profession, Ergese recommended that the Ministry of Education review the conditions of teachers with the aim of retaining a corps satisfied and proud of its profession. The conditions to be looked into are the training, administration, assignment, evaluation (e.g., good, very good), progress, transfer, and salary scale. The Ergese believed that if these factors were taken care of, the teaching-learning process would greatly improve.

An innovation that Ergese proposed as beneficial to students is the establishment of a *Counselling and Guidance Service*. Properly manned

and financed, the personnel in the *Counselling and Guidance Service* would guide and advise students, thereby increasing their motivation for education. The idea of the school providing such services seems to be inspired by the practice of developed countries, e.g., Sweden, and there is inherently nothing wrong in arguing for the introduction of services and methods well tried elsewhere. However, there ought to be sufficient background study on the appropriateness of such innovations.

The *Counselling and Guidance Service* that Ergese is arguing for would require the creation of a rather elaborate and expensive superstructure. It could be envisaged that within the Ministry of Education a new department would have to be created to administer the service. At a lower level, a college would be needed to train the counselling and guidance personnel. At the school level, the counsellors would have to be accommodated in such a manner that they could provide individual guidance to students. Such services become useful when students have a wide range of choices during and after their completion of school. The Ethiopian school experience does not offer many chances to its students. Therefore, the question as to how the new *Counselling and Guidance Service* can make itself useful remains open. Although the idea, like many similar ideas, has nothing objectionable, it appears to me to be a clear case of the importation of inappropriate knowledge. The importation of such service could be figuratively expressed as putting the chariot before the horse. At present Ethiopian education has other more fundamental tasks to deal with: namely, quality, objectives, and implementation.

Related to the above recommendation is the role of the parents in the "creation of an all rounded socialist citizen."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the entire responsibility is not put on parents alone; the school and the society at large have a share in it. However, the greatest responsibility is placed on parents. Ergese reminds the MOE (instead of the state) that sufficient mobilization is needed to make it clear to parents the responsibilities they bear concerning the education and upbringing of their children. The Ergese authors, as can be easily seen, make too broad an assumption. Firstly, let us take the possibility of parents to exercise strict supervision over their schooled children. In developing countries, where the generation gap has drastically widened due to western education, parents have very little control over their children. The peer culture and the social reality outside of home determine to a great extent the social consciousness of students.

Secondly, Ergese assumes that parents either know or fully share the objectives of education, i.e. the creation of a socialist citizen. Even if



parents know and fully approve of the objective of education, it would be unreasonable to expect the parents to exert more pressure than what they actually do. In the present circumstances, where the majority of Ethiopian students are partially employed during their school life (2 hours and forty minutes per day), and completely unemployed after their completion of secondary education, there is virtually nothing that parents could do to motivate their children.

Another edifice that Ergese envisages establishing is an *Institute of Education Research* designed to carry out evaluation research. It is not clear from the Ergese recommendations how this new institute shall be related to the Curriculum Development Department. The structure of the institute is, however, very well sketched. A central Institute of Educational Research would be responsible for the formation and supervision of the activities of the institute both at provincial and district levels. The idea is that each school should have one or several people connected to the Institute of Educational Research.

Like the *Counselling and Guidance Services*, the *Institute for Educational Research* would create a number of jobs for high school or college graduates. This would mean that the budget for education would be spread more thinly and that society would become even more bureaucratic. The bureaucracy, which at the moment is eating up the revenue, leaving virtually nothing for productive investment, would be forced to look for foreign sources for its survival.

I do not think that the formation of an *Institute for Educational Research* would serve the purpose that Ergese envisions. Evaluation is always carried out, although the means vary widely. Parents evaluate the school daily; teachers do the same. Although important, it is very hard to justify the establishment of an institute on a permanent basis within the Ministry of Education. The more so, since an *Institute of Education Research* already exists within Addis Ababa University, where it rightly belongs. Ergese, as a project dominated by the spirit and personnel of the Curriculum Development Department, appears to have been more concerned with sectoral interests.

The recommendations designed to minimize drop-outs and regression are highly interesting. According to Ergese, the rate of drop-outs is continually increasing and that, comparatively speaking, boys interrupt their education more frequently than girls. The highest frequency of drop-outs is in the first two years of primary education. The Ergese recommendation, which calls for the automatic promotion from grade one to grade three, has every reason to be commended. However, the reasons for the drop-out phenomenon may be discussed at length. According to Ergese the main reasons for regression are i)

national exams; ii) school exams; iii) the wastage of school programme due to the public commitments of students and teachers; iv) failure of implementation of instruction; v) the shortage of competent teachers; and, vi) the legacy of culture. Ergese concluded that, unless these problems are eliminated, it would be difficult to claim that the school programme is being carried out properly. The only comment that needs to be made here is that Ergese confuses the symptoms with the causes of the problems of Ethiopian education.

#### *Measures to be taken by society at large*

A social problem that the Ergese report argued passionately – and with justification – was the problem of accommodations confronting both teachers and students. Nearly half of the teachers lack appropriate accommodations, while 43 per cent of students live as dependents of friends or relatives. Ergese suggested the existence of a causal connection between the access of teachers and students to appropriate accommodations and the quality of their performance. Ergese recommended strongly that the neighbourhood and urban dwellers' associations give high priority to teachers' and students' accommodation needs. The professional organizations such as AETU, REYA, REWA were also expected to build temporary housing.<sup>22</sup>

In regard to overcrowding, Ergese noted that one of its findings was the fact that there were too many students in each class – a situation that adversely affects the teaching-learning process. Therefore, in order to carry out satisfactory teaching and learning, it is important that school committees together with rural and urban organizations study the problem and build additional classrooms. Moreover, Ergese advised that local administrative institutions assume responsibility of repairing schools and of constructing educational offices.

The active participation of the society at large is also sought concerning the implementation of the educational process. Ergese reminded its readers that the educational process ought not to be seen as the sole responsibility of the state. In the field of the teaching-learning process in general, and especially in the campaign to increase student motivation, parents, school committees, and other professional associations ought to inform the population and strive to be informed. Bearing in mind that students are compelled to study in shifts due to shortage of classrooms, the popular organizations ought to shoulder the task of organizing and establishing libraries and recreation facilities. Moreover, these popular organizations need via the media network to undertake an increasing campaign on the responsibility of

parents to provide a conducive environment for their school children.

The teacher also has a decisive role to play in the implementation of the main national educational objective, i.e. universal education. The teacher should be an example and a symbol for his students. The teacher ought to be in a position to use teaching methods which are demanded by the twentieth century culture of science and technology. As the organization that has the prime responsibility of upgrading the competence of teachers, Ergese put a great deal of trust in the Teachers' Association.

In addition to the responsibility of one day being entrusted with the leadership of the country, Ergese expressed the opinion that the youth have a very important role to play in the transitional phase of political and social reconstruction. In order to carry out this complex responsibility, the National Youth Association needs to work out a detailed programme of action that would enable it to control its members (students), to enforce school and classroom discipline, to improve interest and motivation for education, and to lay down the foundations for a new culture based on education for production.

#### *Issues that require state intervention*

##### CONCERNING MANPOWER

After duly noting that the revolutionary government has not refrained from exerting its utmost to make equal education available to all, Ergese summarized the evaluation of the competence and motivation of primary school teachers. Two major problems were identified. Firstly, nearly fifty per cent of those interviewed did not benefit from their training. Secondly, in spite of the training, the competence and, therefore, the motivation of primary school teachers was low. Ergese was of the opinion that the main causes lie in the unmanageable number of courses teacher trainees are expected to take within one year and the inadequacy of the training period for sufficient and satisfactory assimilation of knowledge. Ergese suggested a two stage solution to the problem. During the transition period, the 17 subjects currently given to teacher trainees would be regrouped to fewer subjects that could be assimilated within one year. Meanwhile, Ergese sought the decision of the state to extend the current one year Teachers Training Programme to a two-year programme.

Ergese also wanted the state to empower the Ministry of Education to be the sole authority to educate teachers for secondary schools. This was motivated by Ergese findings and observations. Currently, secondary teachers have very little professional preparation. University

graduates who find themselves as secondary teachers may know their subject matter but have not been trained to teach it. Even those who joined the teaching profession via the Faculty of Education are pedagogically ill-prepared. The problem is further complicated by the employment policy of the government that assigns university graduates to their posts, which in effect means that more than 60 per cent of the secondary teachers are unhappy with their profession. Being of the opinion that those institutions which train secondary school teachers should be under the Ministry of Education, Ergese, therefore, sought the decision of the government on the matter. Finally, Ergese reminded the government to expedite the completion of the ongoing enquiry into teachers' salaries and the implementation of a remuneration system where teachers salaries would be equal to those of public employees in other sectors.

**ILLITERACY CAMPAIGN AND FURTHER CONSOLIDATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION**  
As part of the campaign to eliminate illiteracy, a strategy needs to be worked out aimed at providing universal and obligatory education at least up to a certain level. Ergese pointed out the necessity of libraries and other centres of education and culture in order to develop the quality of education. Ergese called for the strengthening of village libraries.

##### WASTAGE

Since the highest rate of wastage and regression occurs in the first two years of school life, Ergese recommended that the government intensify its campaign among the party functionaries, the bureaucracy, and the popular organizations to mobilize the population on the importance of providing assistance to students in the early primary stage to prevent them from leaving school before they have mastered the elements of literacy. Ergese also expected the government to instruct the appropriate departments to make available space to schools who need it for sports, agricultural plots, extra classrooms, and recreation halls.

##### IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATION

Since the Revolution, primary schools have been established in many parts of the country. Therefore, the number of secondary school students has greatly increased. However, many vocational and professional secondary school graduates have very little chance of finding appropriate employment. These students can not use their training for the benefit of the country. Since the unemployment of

secondary graduates creates economic and social problems, the society (state) would save time and resources if it could see to it that the educational system graduates enough students who could be absorbed by the needs of the country.

#### ON NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS

According to the findings, the number of students who are eligible to attend grades seven, nine and post-secondary is too high when compared to the country's resources and absorption capacity. The practical difficulty of controlling students' entrance to junior and senior secondary institutions has produced a negative effect on the quality of education. Therefore, there is a need (based on studies) to determine precisely the number of students who would be allowed to continue to junior and secondary schools. The criteria for controlled expansion ought to be the necessity of maintaining a balance between quality and the manpower needs of the country.

#### ON THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

Ergese commented that, in spite of a long life as a medium, English has created serious difficulties for teachers, as well as for students. Ergese recommended that the state refer the issue of media of instruction to an expert committee, the recommendations of which would be used as a basis for language policy.

The remaining part of the volume is devoted to the organizational aspects, beginning with the MOE and progressing to the primary school. The organizational structure of the Ministry of Education is not a subject for discussion because it is an aspect, given the circumstances, that functions very well. Next to the police station, it has been commented to me, the school is the arm of the state that is visible in every corner of the country. In contrast to the Ministry of Interior, with its strict disciplinary system, the MOE is manned entirely by a civilian bureaucracy. The problem of the Ethiopian state does not lie in its organizational inefficiency – in fact there is too much of it – but in the concentration of power at the centre in virtually every aspect of social life. There seems to be a close correlation between the centralization of decision-making and the inhibition of initiative from below.

The impression that one gets from the Ergese report is that of an educational sector whose problems could be satisfactorily managed by the infusion of additional funds geared towards the upgrading of teacher competence in methodology and subject matter.

There is a widespread consensus on the decline of the quality of

education both among policy makers and the public at large. There is, however, hardly any debate on the issue. The Ergese report, which forms the official view, has been classified as secret, and, therefore, it has not been distributed for discussion and debate.

According to my judgement, the Achilles heel of the Ethiopian education system lies in the fact that educational policy has never been made public. The officials of the Ministry of Education have thus far been producing policies behind closed doors with hardly any feedback from the public.

The final Ergese report containing the findings and recommendations was submitted to the government at the end of 1985. Since then it has not been possible to establish the extent to which the government adopted the Ergese recommendations. From the few available sources, it appears that the government has either ignored the Ergese report completely or simply shelved it. Instead the government has expressed its aspiration of phasing out the current 6+4+4-year system in favour of an even more expensive and more comprehensive system of universal polytechnical education in a three tier system of 8+2+2 years. It is not yet indicated how the government would finance the expansion of the educational sector that would inevitably follow the implementation of the new educational orientation.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Central Report to the Second Congress of COPWE, (Committee for Organizing the Workers Party of Ethiopia), January, 1983, Addis Ababa, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> The workshops were i) Curriculum Development and Teaching-Learning Process; ii) Educational Administration, Structure and Planning; iii) Educational Logistics, Supportive Services and Manpower Training; and iv) Educational Evaluation and Research.

<sup>3</sup> *Evaluative Research of the General Education System in Ethiopia. A Quality Study.* Summary Report Presented to the Executive Committee of Ergese, Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa, May, 1986.

<sup>4</sup> *Central Report delivered by Mengistu Haile Mariam at the founding Congress of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, September, 1984, p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> To cite some examples: Ergese's recommendation on the abolition of national examinations at grade six; the automatic promotion in the first two grades of primary education; and the provision of eight years education to every citizen were all laid down in the policy document *Objectives and Directives of Ethiopian Education*, produced by the Ministry of Education in 1980.

<sup>6</sup> Discussion on the national goals of education or the national objectives of education is pursued at a high rhetorical level. The educational goals or objectives are education for production; education for scientific enquiry; and education for



socialist consciousness. See the *Programme of the national Democratic Revolution of Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, 1976. See also the *Central Report of the Founding Congress of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, 1984.

<sup>7</sup> According to the *Report of the Workshop on Curriculum Development and Teaching-Learning Process*, slightly more than one hundred teachers, directors, and school administrators were asked.

<sup>8</sup> *Report of the Workshop on Curriculum Development*, table 12, p. 104.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>11</sup> *Report of the Evaluative Research on the General Education System in Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, 1986.

<sup>12</sup> *Final Report of the Evaluative Research on the General Education System in Ethiopia* presented to the Policy Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa, October, 1986.

<sup>13</sup> *Report of the Evaluative Research on the General Education System in Ethiopia*, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> This is the only occasion where reference to the *Objectives and Directives of Ethiopian Education*, is made.

<sup>15</sup> The problem of assigning young graduates to their places of work by the Central Planning Commission applies to all categories of public employees. The disadvantages of this practice far outweigh its advantages. This practice was in operation well before the Revolution and its rationale can be traced to the attempts of the government to distribute manpower according to the needs of the regions. Its advantage lay in the fact that young graduates were saved from hard competition for jobs as the government assumed responsibility for the provision of jobs. The disadvantage was that many graduates found themselves in sectors where they either were not fully competent or lacked motivation. The labour market became very rigid. The largest employer being the state, young graduates had very little opportunity of choice. Moreover, this practice has been further refined since 1974 with the effect that, once a person is assigned to a position, he or she has virtually no possibility of changing the place of work.

The argument used by the state in favour of forced assignment is the fear that there would be a shortage of skilled labour in the countryside and that the uneven distribution of trained manpower – which already exists – might even become more pronounced. In a labour market with a certain degree of autonomy, labour seekers would be compelled to accept available jobs. Moreover, if the state wishes to attract qualified labour to the countryside, it has a number of options open to it. It could, for instance, use a differentiated salary scale system and other fringe benefits to those who are prepared to move out. The net effect would certainly be that the teaching profession would be staffed by voluntarily recruited teachers.

<sup>16</sup> *Report of the Workshop on Curriculum Development and Teaching-Learning Process*, p. 79. The exceptional subjects that had teacher manuals were Math, Physical Education and General Business.

<sup>17</sup> *Report of the Evaluative Research on the General Education System in Ethiopia*, p. 58.

<sup>18</sup> For the allocation of the budget to the various levels of the sector see, Ministry of Education, *Basic Education Statistics*, Addis Ababa, October, 1988, p. 14 for student enrollment, and p. 20 for recurrent budget.

<sup>19</sup> *The Ten Year Perspective Plan (1984-5 – 1994-5)*, Addis Ababa, 1984.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Education, *Educational Objectives and Directives for Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, 1980.

<sup>21</sup> This is one of the main objectives of Ethiopian education as stated in the documents of the Ministry of Education and the government. See the *Ten Year Perspective Plan. 1984-5 – 1994-5*, Addis Ababa, p.436.

<sup>22</sup> AETU - All Ethiopian Trade Union; REYA - Revolutionary Ethiopia's Youth Association; REWA - Revolutionary Ethiopia's Women' Association.

## The State of Ethiopian Education

Ethiopian education is in a far more worse state than what is implied by Ergese. To speak in terms of a decline in quality is really to underestimate the seriousness of the situation. In 1988 I had the opportunity to observe the teaching-learning process in two of the country's well-established institutions: namely, Minilik II and Entoto Comprehensive Secondary Schools, both in Addis Ababa.<sup>1</sup> I had also an opportunity to learn, through a close member of my family, the operations of grade nine at Barca Comprehensive Secondary School at Asmara. From these observations and from a case study of the teaching-learning process in the subject of history, it is very hard to say that Ethiopia has a functioning secondary education system.

In 1988 at Entoto Comprehensive Secondary School, there were thirteen parallel grade nine classes.<sup>2</sup> Each class had between 84 and 120 students. Comparatively speaking, the situation was slightly better for students in grade ten. The thirteen classes in grade ten had between 80 and 90 students each. The average number of students in each class in grades eleven and twelve was between 70 and 75.

A school day is concentrated to half a day, made up of six 40 minute periods. The school premises are unavailable to students outside class hours, since they are occupied by students of the second shift.

Students in grade nine and ten have a school programme containing 14 subjects.<sup>3</sup> This means that a ninth grade student has 14 different teachers during the course of the year. Instruction is in English – a medium that gives rise to more problems. The English language proficiency of both teachers and students is so low that Amharic is naturally used as the *de facto* language of instruction. The difficulty that students had with English was graphically illustrated when teachers said that many of their students can hardly write their names and that of their school correctly in that language. Secondary teaching is carried on in a language where the students have never had the opportunity to either write for or listen to native speakers. Although very serious indeed, the language dimension is a manageable problem. Far more serious is the demoralizing state of affairs created by overcrowded classrooms and the extremely heavy teaching load.

Secondary teachers are employed to teach 30 periods a week. Just over 90 per cent of the teachers have a teaching load not exceeding

thirty periods a week, although a considerable number – 8 per cent according to Ergese survey – teach more than 30 periods. In reality the teaching load is much heavier than what is implied by merely looking at the number of teaching hours. The teaching of 14 subjects within a week composed of 30 periods means that many subjects are given one or two periods a week. Let us illustrate the impact of this by looking into the experience of history teachers. In both grades nine and ten, history is given two periods a week. Since a history teacher is obliged to teach up to 30 periods, he or she theoretically could be responsible for 15 parallel classes. And, in fact, history teachers that I met both at Entoto and Minilik II were responsible for 10 parallel classes. Seen from the planning rooms of Ministry of Education, the work load of the teachers can not be said to be very heavy. In reality, however, history teachers at Entoto, Minilik II, and Barca secondary schools had to teach between 850 and 1000 students. The situation is slightly better for subjects such as Mathematics, Amharic and English, due to the higher number of periods allocated. An English language teacher can not, for instance, be responsible for more than seven parallel classes without exceeding the maximum teaching load, whereas a history teacher may have up to 15 parallel classes before he or she reaches the maximum load.

The negative implications on the morale and motivation of teachers can hardly be exaggerated. Students have no names, only numbers.<sup>4</sup> Teacher-student communication is virtually impossible due to overcrowding and the heavy teaching load. From the beginning to end, the school year is a depressing experience both for teachers and students. The range of problems that a secondary teacher faces cover every aspect of the teaching-learning process. Secondary teachers have no teaching manuals designed to assist them. Textbooks, which are loaned to students against payment, are always in short supply. In most subjects one textbook is shared by several students. In Asmara the average distribution was one textbook per ten students. Since the loss of a textbook carried with it a substantial fine, students rarely brought their textbooks to school. The risk of a textbook being stolen is very high due to the attractive second-hand market. Teachers do not insist that students bring their textbooks to class partly due to a genuine concern for the economy of students and partly due to the fact that students do not understand the language as well as the contents of their texts.

History teachers, according to my observations, spent the first period writing down notes and the remaining period for explanation. With luck, if classes were not interrupted for the many reasons discussed

above, a teacher would succeed within one week to dictate about half a page of notes and explain them. The teacher would, however, be in no position to cover the textbook assigned for the grade. Dictation of notes and their explanation is done with no motivation at all due to the hundreds of students in his charge. The teacher has no way of judging the learning potential of students. There are other constraints as well. Secondary teachers work under the policy guideline that by the end of the academic year 85 per cent of the students in each class have to be promoted to the next level.<sup>5</sup> The teacher's job as I understood it is to choose the 15 per cent who will not make it.

Another consequence of overcrowding is the awareness of both teachers and students of the bleak future that awaits students after their completion of secondary education. Out of the approximately sixty thousand secondary graduates (by the end of 1989), as many as twenty thousand might in one way or another be absorbed by the labour market.<sup>6</sup> The remaining have to join the army of the unemployed. This is partly due to the fact that the state, the greatest employer, has been overstaffed and that the public sector can expand only at the expense of eating up all revenue and even more.<sup>7</sup> The private sector, which on the eve of the Revolution had begun to emerge, has been virtually abolished.<sup>8</sup> It is, therefore, of very little importance as an absorber of middle-level trained manpower. The impact of this climate of hopelessness is that neither teachers nor students possess enthusiasm and professional pride. As one of the teachers at Entoto Comprehensive Secondary School put it, "We teachers have during the last ten years ceased to teach." He continued and said that the school has become a prison for students, because they lack the most essential base, i.e. English, to follow their studies, and above all, because they have no future after school.

### *Overcrowding*

The official teacher-student ratio in secondary schools in 1986-87 was 1:37. This figure can not be entirely relied upon, because, firstly, contradictory ratios exist and secondly, it is not clear whether school officials are included in the list of teachers. Moreover, the official teacher-student ratio, is based on a simple division of the number of students by the number of teachers. The ratio of one teacher to 37 students, therefore, does not say very much about the size of individual classes. The teacher-student ratio is an aggregate figure that distorts the reality prevailing in the schools.

The size of each class in grades nine and ten throughout the country

lies most certainly between 65 and 90 students, with a slight decrease of numbers in the last two grades of the secondary programme. The class sizes at Entoto, Menelik II and Barca are by no means exceptions. The official reason for overcrowding is the shortage of classrooms, which, in turn, is caused by the scarcity of capital expenditure on school building. The 326,000 (1987 figures) secondary students carry on their studies in 260 schools with the highest concentration in the few large cities. The teacher-student ratio of 1:37 hardly gives the impression that the size of individual classes can be as high as between 65 and 90. It is rather a combination of a shortage of classrooms and the doubling of school subjects from seven in 1974 to 14 from 1978 onwards.

There are two types of overcrowding. The first type is that created by squeezing in as many students as possible into a class due to shortage of extra classrooms arising from uncontrolled expansion. We have briefly seen the impact of such overcrowding on teaching and the learning process. The second type of overcrowding is created by the number of subjects that students are expected to follow. In a country where most of the teaching takes place in the classroom, overcrowding at both levels is self-defeating.

The increase of subjects from seven in 1974 to 14 subjects since 1978 has resulted in the fragmented transmission of knowledge and in a considerable increase in the teaching load. A history teacher who prior to 1974 was responsible for perhaps five classes (4 periods a week for each class) has since 1978 assumed responsibility for more than twice as many students due to the fact that history is now given two periods a week. The impact of the new educational policy on teachers and teaching morale has been, according to my assessment, extremely damaging. The teacher who even during the imperial regime was, "... a typical disgruntled individual, who views the ministry as his enemy and his duty as a chore, who is consistently on the look out for another job and who has been embittered by the lack of salary increments and by the absence of any appreciation of the conditions of hardship in which he teaches,"<sup>9</sup> became even more disgruntled.

Overcrowded individual classes and the doubling of subjects, I believe, are the fundamental causes for the alarming decline of quality of education in Ethiopia today. A debate on a reform of the educational system needs to begin with the teacher-student ratio in the classroom. How many students can a teacher successfully teach within one period? Should the teaching load be defined, as it is currently, by the number of hours, e.g. thirty hours a week, or by the number of students that a teacher can satisfactorily educate? Although there are no short cuts to a substantial reform of the educational system, the

most promising point of departure seems to be to create conditions for teachers and parents to evolve an educational policy. This would bring about a more substantial democratization of the society – which is the ultimate objective of the government.

### *English as a medium of instruction*

The most well-thought out recommendation of ERGESE deals with the impact of the medium of instruction on teaching and learning. The medium of instruction has two dimensions. The first that affects early school life of children is the use of Amharic in predominantly non-Amharic speaking areas. Ergese neither summarized the state of research nor did it attempt to observe the use and impact of Amharic at the classroom level. Ergese satisfied itself with the replies to a single question on whether Amharic created difficulties for non-Amharic speakers. The question was administered to very few school officials. In the concluding summary, Ergese noted that Amharic has affected the teaching and learning process at the primary level. It was also pointed out that a series of studies were required on the advantages and disadvantages of Amharic as a medium of instruction. Meanwhile, in areas where languages other than Amharic are predominantly used, Ergese recommended that an additional period be assigned for Amharic and that efforts be made to recruit well qualified teachers for the first grades.

Concerning English the Ergese report began by pointing to the difficulty of making an automatic switch from English to Amharic prior to carrying out exhaustive studies on the subject. Therefore, Ergese recommended the promulgation of a language policy and a policy on the media of instruction. Anticipating the contents of the national policy on the media of instruction, Ergese pointed to the urgent need of replacing English with Amharic in the secondary schools since the problems of teaching and learning created by the use of English are indeed very serious.

Although the Ergese authors have a full understanding of the seriousness of the problem of the use of English, they did not manage to put across to the policy makers the need for a speedy solution.

The issue of the medium of instruction was confronted by the Ministry of Education as early as 1980 in the *Objectives and Directives of Ethiopian Education*. Instead of simply advising the government to issue a language policy, the Ergese authors ought to have commented on the strategy adopted by the Ministry of Education. In the 1980 policy document, the Ministry of Education dealt concretely, firstly,

with the actual language practice in the schools, and secondly, with the policy likely to be adopted in the future. "Amharic," the MOE policy experts wrote, "shall be the language of instruction until such time that there are teachers and textbooks in other Ethiopian languages."<sup>10</sup> As a long term solution, the document called for the creation of a language academy – an institution designed to hasten the development of the remaining Ethiopian languages into media of instruction. In the secondary schools, the 1980 document saw the problem clearly when it reasoned that Amharic and English could be used as media of instruction. The deciding factor was the feasibility of using both languages. The policy makers were fully aware of the problem of English as a medium of instruction as well as of an eventual replacement of English by Amharic.

The greatest obstacle to national cultural independence and eventual economic development is the use of foreign languages as the media of instruction. The use of foreign languages as media in the African context is closely connected with the colonial experience. Modern education in Africa is essentially a European education with an African touch.<sup>11</sup> Western-type education was introduced by the Ethiopian state in the beginning of this century and was perceived as complementary to that given by the Ethiopian Church. The objectives of Ethiopian education during the first thirty years of this century were essentially different from those developed after the Second World War. During the first phase, education was seen as an instrument that would enable Ethiopians to understand the diplomacy of Europe. Western education was, one could say, a strategy adopted by Emperor Minilik to avoid situations similar to the Italo-Ethiopian war at Adwa (1896), where the source of the conflict was an incorrect translation of a political word.

After the Second World War, the modernization of the country called for a labour force educated in Western type schools. The golden age of education, when all those who completed their schooling found appropriate employment, lasted a little more than two decades, i.e., 1941–1965. This was roughly the period that was required for the majority of the population to realize that education, seen in cost–benefit terms, was a paying proposition. Schooled citizens were given white collar jobs and earned astronomical wages compared to their less privileged kin. A salary system that turned education into an end in itself was also introduced during the 1941–1965 period, whereby the salary of an employee was fixed on educational merits rather than on the nature and complexity of the post he or she occupied.

Given the fact that Ethiopia has the advantage of a long written history and political culture, it is indeed surprising that the Ethiopian state, both past and present, has done very little to produce literature in Amharic that could eventually be used in secondary schools. Nor has a significant attempt been made to facilitate the eventual replacement of English by Amharic. The consequences of the use of English from grade seven onwards have been extremely negative. The foreign medium has functioned as a barrier between students and their relatives at home. The generation gap became even sharper because of the medium of instruction, which turned school children into more sophisticated and infallible "semi-gods". Most of those who left school before 1974 believed themselves to be the unspoken leaders of Ethiopian society.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Irrelevance of subject matter*

A major objective of a national education is the transmission of political and cultural values that enhance the continued existence of the nation or state. In the Ethiopian context this objective has been expressed clearly both by the old and the new regimes. During the imperial regime, more emphasis was put on the creation of a well-rounded personality who would be educated to be proud of Ethiopia's long history and culture. In the post-1974 Ethiopia, the objective is to create a socialist personality by focusing education on production, research, and political consciousness. Although the school is not the only institution engaged in either the maintenance of a homogenous culture or in the enhancement of an integrating culture (in multi-ethnic states), its role for this purpose seems to be greater in developing countries.

In the following pages the issue that I intend to explore deals with whether Ethiopian secondary curriculum reflects the national objectives of education. Due to the nature of this study, I shall limit the discussion to the teaching of history in the secondary schools. I shall argue that national objectives are too broad to be of any concrete guidance and that there appears to be great confusion as to what is relevant to teach. I chose the teaching of history for two reasons. Firstly, it is the subject which I have studied in some detail. Secondly, I have come to believe in recent years that underdevelopment can not be overcome until such time when the citizens of a country begin to appreciate their history. The cultural determinants of underdevelopment are far more decisive than the structural economic

bottlenecks that exist due to the integration of Ethiopian economy in the global system.<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned earlier, history has been rated by Ergese as one of the subjects that exhibited many weaknesses. It needs to be stressed, however, that Ergese did not consider the relevance of the content. It mainly dealt with whether the content satisfied certain requirements of message and focus. Ergese did not attempt to evaluate the content of history textbooks in terms of their relevance for nation-building. This is not a criticism of Ergese. I am simply pointing out that the evaluation of contents in terms of relevance is an important aspect that Ergese did not study. What should Ethiopian students study under the subject history? It is with this question in view that we shall attempt to comment on textbooks currently used in Ethiopian schools.

Since 1980, textbooks have been available to students in grade nine to twelve. In grades nine and ten, history is taught two periods a week, and three periods in grades eleven and twelve. Ethiopian history is only given in grades nine and ten. In the last two grades, Ethiopian history gives way to world history.

The textbook for grade nine (1980 edition) contains 184 pages out of which 38 pages are devoted to Ethiopian history.<sup>14</sup> The importance given to Ethiopian history expressed in terms of space (time) is in itself a controversial issue that we shall deal with later. Given that grade nine is the beginning of a new educational programme that is terminal for the overwhelming majority of students, the chapter on Ethiopian history begins suddenly and ends abruptly. The grade nine textbook starts from the aftermath of the Gran invasion (1527-1543) and ends with the rise of Emperor Tewodros in 1855. This period of Ethiopian history is characterized by the Oromo expansion into the Tigray and Amhara homelands and their eventual incorporation/ assimilation into the Ethiopian political and cultural system.

The Oromo expansion to the Tigray and Amhara homelands and their socio-political organization take up most of the space of the first part of the chapter. However, the result of an attempt to cover three centuries in about ten pages is far from satisfactory. What the authors have managed to do is to put bits and pieces of factual information in a manner that makes a mockery of the subject - history. The chapter ought to have been organized as a reply to a general question: what were the most important processes of the period? Such a question was, however, not asked. Moreover, the person or persons who composed the chapter knew very little of the history of the period. In the following passages, I shall attempt to describe the chapter together with a few comments.



The Oromo are introduced as a people belonging "to the stock commonly known as Hamitic or Cushitic," a racial designation that has been out of date since the middle of the 1960's.<sup>15</sup> According to the authors of the textbook, the Oromos started their expansion and migration from their original base in the "village of the Wabe Shebele and Juba rivers and extending westward beyond Lake Abaya in the north of present day Ethiopia." First put forth in the early 1960's this interpretation was proved erroneous in the seminal study by an Ethiopian anthropologist in the early 1970's.<sup>16</sup> It has since then been established that the original base for Oromo expansion was Borana in southwest Ethiopia and not the Ethio-Somali borderland.<sup>17</sup>

Many passages are devoted to a description of the Oromo techniques of warfare, reasons for Oromo victory over the Amhara and Tigray, and Oromo socio-political organization. These descriptions are written in the ethnographic present that takes no account of the many changes that took place during the three centuries. The authors write "thus the Oromo socio-political organization was one in which two seemingly contradictory principles existed: a democratic, republican ideal and a leadership by a military-economic ruling elite."<sup>18</sup> There were no two contradictory principles. The democratic and republican ideal ceased to exist with the transition of the Oromo from migrators into settled communities close to or among the Sidama, Tigray and Amhara. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Oromos had dropped the GADA system and adopted an autocratic state system similar to the Sidama kingdoms of Kaffa and Janjero.<sup>19</sup>

The image that forms in the mind of the reader of the history textbook for grade nine is that of a country where the Oromos for the greater part of the period had virtually no contact with the central state. This comes out clearly in the section on the later history of the Oromos. "The Oromo chiefs gradually turned into feudal landlords and most of the Oromo became peasants. Gradually good relations were established between the Oromo landlords and the ruling classes of the highland regions. Therefore, in the middle of the eighteenth century Oromo feudal lords could be found among the courtiers and high ranking generals of the Ethiopian kingdom."<sup>20</sup>

Although the sixteenth to nineteenth century period can be interpreted in many ways, the themes of ethnic integration and the evolution of a multi-ethnic state with the Oromo as one of the powerful ethnic groups eventually dominating the Ethiopian state can not be evaded. In the Amhara and Tigray homelands, the Oromo who succeeded in entrenching themselves in Wello (Yejju Province) were able to dominate the Ethiopian state apparatus for nearly a century.

The authors of the textbook, however, have altogether avoided this issue thus compelling us to raise the following questions: How does the government view Ethiopian history during the period from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century? What are the most important events, developments or processes that need to be highlighted in the extremely limited available space? Does the state consider history useful for nation-building? We know that the state relies very heavily on history in its campaign against the forces of secession. However, this use of history is not at all reflected in the textbooks. On the contrary, the ten pages devoted to the Oromos give the impression that the intensive Oromo, Amhara and Tigray contacts in central and northwestern Ethiopia did not result in the evolution of a multi-ethnic community with a very strong common political identity. The careless and purposeless text is, I believe, due to the incompetence of the authors, and to the virtual absence of policy guidelines.

While the problem of competence shall be discussed later, I would like to say few words on the range of problems created by the use of English as a medium of instruction. In an environment where a foreign language has no widespread sphere of influence, its use for teaching subjects such as history turns the latter into something that is dissociated from everyday life. It is in itself a difficult task to teach students history of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, but it becomes virtually impossible to do so through a medium that neither teachers, students, nor the public outside school fully understand. Therefore, in order to make the subject manageable, it has to be broken into many unrelated pieces that do not make much sense.

Another ten pages are devoted to the Sidama region, an extensive area in the south of Ethiopia which included the kingdoms of Janjero, Wellayita and the Guraghe. Information is derived from ethnographic manuscripts of the 1950's rather than from historical and anthropological research. Neither in the textbook for grade nine nor in the textbook for grade ten has it been made clear how and when the foundations for the evolution of the Ethiopian community were laid down.

The part that has received the worst treatment, in my opinion, is the Ethiopian state and society described in the text as the "central feudal state." The history of Ethiopia of the period has been described as a continuous power struggle that makes extremely boring reading. Indeed, armed struggles between aspirants to the throne during virtually every occasion for succession have been a recurrent feature of Ethiopian history. There have been few attempts to explain this particular phenomenon. However, many developments did occur

during the three centuries covered in the text. As far as the authors of the text are concerned, the only worthwhile experience they note is the religious conflict that dominated Ethiopian affairs between 1611 and 1632. Ethiopian kings were receptive to Roman Catholicism – a faith strongly opposed by the Ethiopian Church – with the result that the country was plunged into a civil war. The issue was not over a reform of the Ethiopian Church but a complete conversion to the Catholic faith. According to authors of the text the conflict, as well as its outcome was:

"However, it was clear beyond doubt that Ethiopians would die than submit to the new religion. Seeing this Susenyos volunteered to abdicate in favour of his son Fasiledes (June 1632). On the abdication ceremony Susenyos issued a proclamation restoring traditional religion. Soon the uprising came to an end.

With this it became clear subsequent efforts to introduce reforms, however moderate, were badly handicapped. Yet the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia stood in grave need of reformation in respect to both morals and hierarchy.

Whatever the outcome this period could be compared to the age of the renaissance in the Ethiopian context.

The uprisings produced consequences of a lasting value. For example there was a great revival in Geez literature. Amharic was established as a written language. Fine arts began to take on new (Ethiopian) forms. Buildings were constructed of a type rarely seen hitherto. Palaces were also built with architectural achievements that came to represent the forerunners of the city of Gondar. The city of Gondar itself was to come soon afterwards. Certain civil reforms were also brought about during this period. And in general there was a great awakening in art, literature, and religion inspiring in subsequent generations the will to create a new Ethiopia."<sup>21</sup>

It is very difficult to comment on such a contradictory passage. If Ethiopia had its "renaissance" period, it occurred certainly after the establishment of Gondar, i.e., after 1632 and not before. Moreover, one can not avoid the impression that the authors were disappointed at the failure of Emperor Susenyos and the Spanish Jesuits to convert Ethiopia to the Catholic Faith.

The theme of Ethiopian history as nothing but a feudal power struggle is continued until the rise of Emperor Tewodros in 1855. The century commonly described as the "Era of Princes," 1769-1855, is

described without any attempt towards some form of synthesis of the research on the subject. The Era of Princes (Zemene Mesafint) was the period when Ethiopia was ruled by an Oromo dynasty from the province of Yeju in Wello. The authors mention Oromo involvement but do not put this involvement in a broader perspective.

The Era of Princes was not a period of "endless wars." The essential difference between the earlier period and the period of the Era of Princes was that real power lay in the hand of the Oromo provincial rulers, rather than in the hands of the "king of kings." Until recently our knowledge of the period was derived from the chroniclers of the Ethiopian Church, who regretted the decline of the power of the king of kings and were highly suspicious of the Christianity of the Oromo rulers of Ethiopia.<sup>22</sup>

Taken as a whole, the chapter on Ethiopian history has virtually no relevance for nation-building. Written without any themes, the chapter dealt with histories of regions rather than of the country as a whole. The chapter does a great injustice to Ethiopian history of the period that witnessed several experiments in power relations between the centre and the outlying regions. It was during this period that some of the Oromo settled among the Amhara and Tigray communities and emerged as a power bloc that dominated Ethiopian affairs for nearly a century. It was during this period that central power was exercised by princes with strong provincial bases rather than by the king of kings who earlier had a multi-regional power base. It was also during this period that the Ethiopian elite successfully fought against the king of kings and his Jesuit supporters for the maintenance of an indigenous faith.

It is deplorable that the chapter was drafted with no guiding themes at all. Textbook writing is by nature a political and ideological response to a series of questions raised by the state. The answers may vary but the questions seem to be the same everywhere. These include: What does the generation in power expect the younger generation to know? In what ways does the present generation wish to form the character of the succeeding generation? With these questions in mind, textbook writing attempts to strike a balance between the aspirations of the educating generation and the reconstruction of the past in a way that would satisfy the demands of both generations. In the Ethiopian case, the present generation can not but desire to impart nationalist and patriotic sentiments. However, the steps that this generation has taken thus far appear to have produced a negative result.

Although generations manage to transfer only some values and although the school is not the only institution for this purpose, a great

deal of importance is nevertheless paid to its unifying potential. Therefore, seen within such a context, the chapter on Ethiopian history for grade nine students appears to have been composed in an absolute vacuum. In terms of contents and presentations, the chapter resembles a collection of notes written by a student who has just begun to read Ethiopian history. With such a text – as the only one available to the student during his entire secondary education – it is indeed very hard to even think in terms of a causal relationship between education and nation-building. Even if we were to assume that the chapter is available to each and every student, and that it was read carefully in the class, its impact on the students' understanding of Ethiopian history would have been incorrect, irrelevant, and fragmented.

#### *Ethiopian History for grade Ten*

In terms of space allocation, the situation is much better in the text for grade ten. Whereas one chapter only is devoted to Ethiopian history in the textbook for grade nine, two chapters are devoted in the text for grade ten. Altogether 120 pages out of a total of 322 pages are devoted to Ethiopian history.<sup>23</sup> The chapters are divided between the 1850-1974 period discussed in chapter nine, and the 1974-1978 period treated in the subsequent chapter. However, as regards contents and presentation, the chapter for grade nine is far better than the ones for grade ten.

The language in the grade ten textbook is inspired by the pamphlet culture of the 1960's, where sweeping generalizations and facts were taken for granted. This was due to the fact that these pamphlets were written for a very small elite audience. Moreover, both chapters contain far too many unclear and incomprehensible passages. We shall begin our comments by quoting a few passages in order to illustrate some of the problems.

"In October 1867 a British imperialist expeditionary force of some 32,000 including large numbers of followers and transport servants landed south of Massawa. This force reached Magdala in April 1868, having been considerably helped on its way by Kassa of Tigray and Gobeze of Lasta. On April 10th Tewodros's forces were defeated at Arogee. On April 13th the imperialist forces stormed Maqdala which Tewodros and his force made no attempt to defend. The Emperor committed suicide rather than surrender. The British being unable to stay long in the midst of Ethiopian territory withdrew by the end of May 1868." (p.212). Nowhere in the entire chapter is an explanation given for the background to the Ethio-British war of 1868.

The following passage deals with the problem of clarity. It should be pointed out that such passages constitute the norm regarding the quality of language.

"In the context of Ethiopia's 19th century survival as an independent state, the reign of Tewodros was crucial in many respects. Firstly, Tewodros perceived as none of his predecessors among the feudal war lords (Mesafint) that the political anarchy, moral laxity, and technological backwardness of his people threatened national survival. The reforms he announced, the policies he tried to implement, the very single-mindedness and perseverance with which he tackled the problems, indicate that he aimed at nothing less than a national revival combined with the transformation of his country into a centralized strong, modern feudal Empire state which the European imperialists did not want at that time about this, though there was little doubt during the early years of his reign, it did not materialize" (p.214).

One can not help but sympathize with the predicament of the teacher on whose shoulders rests the responsibility of explaining such texts. To the absence of clarity that characterizes the chapter, another problem is added, that is, the inclusion of paragraphs that have no connection with either the paragraphs above or below. I quote:

"Tewodros was hardly the kind of person who allowed himself to be easily influenced by others. On the other hand, he did not govern in secret. There is no lack in contemporary accounts of references to public meetings and trials, to councils and occasionally a nation-wide assembly of chiefs or governors. Whether Tewodros called these primarily to seek advice, educate his people, or simply make his own will known, the fact remains that he put the issues to his people. Of the three who succeeded him on the throne, Gobeze and Kassa had been military commanders under him: Minilik had grown up as something between an adopted son and a state prisoner, and was married to one of the king's daughters. Though in the end they all became his political rivals, this does not exclude the fact that he had helped shape their political goals, internal as well as external" (pp.217-8)."

To compare the achievements of Emperors Tewodros and Yohannis within a very limited space is a task that requires a far deeper knowledge of the history of entire period than to simply recount their histories in a straightforward chronological order. The attempt to deal



with Emperors Tewodros and Yohannis at the same time has brought more confusion. I quote:

"The attempts of Kassa (Tewodros) to cope with these problems through an active foreign policy had failed. His diplomatic initiatives had brought him only trouble. The guns and mortars which he had more or less forced the Europeans in the country to manufacture had in the final test turned to be useless and the road worse than useless, only hastening his own destruction. There was certainly not much in this to induce Kassa (Yohannes) to desire contacts with Europe or to maintain a European presence in his country. As for the British imperialist force and the government itself, they had no choice, but to shake the dust of Ethiopia off their feet and leave the country.

"Kassa received his reward of six howitzers, six mortars and 850 muskets and rifles with ammunition from the British for the assistance he had provided to defeat Tewodros's army.

"Kassa was quite prepared as Tewodros before him to employ whatever foreign craftsmen happened to turn up at his court; a French mechanic called Rene, a Hungarian gunsmith called Andre, and the Italian builder Giacomo Naretti etc.

Yohannis's foreign contacts during the three years before his coronation amply demonstrates that Yohannis, like Tewodros before him, was eager to cultivate friendly relations with European powers and their subjects; like Tewodros, too, he made an exception for the Catholic missionaries, because he found that their teaching created loyalties towards and hopes for assistance from authorities outside the Ethiopian state. If anything, Yohannis was more active in his foreign policy than Tewodros had been, and both he and Minilik continued in the same way throughout the 1870's and 1880's". (219-20)

In several instances the chronological account of Northern Ethiopian affairs contains factual and chronological errors. This is indeed deplorable since the exhaustive history of the region, as well as of the period (nineteenth century), has been available for ready consultation since 1976. Some of the errors deal with power struggle – the implications and dimensions of which are up to this date controversial. And in several instances, the text could be seen as counterproductive.<sup>24</sup>

For the first time, while assessing Ethiopian victory against Egyptian colonial wars, the authors stumble upon the existence of political unity in Ethiopia. I quote:

"Unlike the imperialists misjudgement of the political strength of Ethiopia, there existed a more political cohesion in Ethiopia and a greater awareness of the issues involved. This does not mean that

Ethiopia was a unified and centralized nation-state, however". (p. 224)

What was the basis of unity in Ethiopia? How does one explain the existence of a political identity in 1875, when nothing was said about the evolution of the unity of the Ethiopian people and society in the single chapter that covered the 1500 to 1800 period? Additional information that could enlighten the student on the nature of political cohesion is not provided. In spite of the fact that the authors intended to focus on the state, the dominant orientation of the chapter remains the political biography of the last four Emperors rather than a history of the people and the society. This has been carried out with very little respect for and knowledge of the milieu under in the Emperors lived and reigned.

Even the discussion of the few and very well-known historical landmarks such as the battles of Dogali (1887) and Adwa (1896) leave much to be desired. As for the Battle of Dogali, the authors seem to doubt even as to whether it should be called a battle. It is possible that the English language was to some extent a contributing factor when the authors wrote: "This was the so called Dogali victory, a far stronger protest than the Italians or British had expected". (p. 227)

The Wichale Treaty of May 2, 1889, a treaty that led to the creation of Eritrea as an Italian colony and to the battle of Adwa, is described in a manner that would have been unacceptable as a senior secondary school paper on the eve of the Revolution.

"The draft treaty included territorial concessions in the northern coastal regions and the regions once held by the Egyptians including Bogos; and calculated Italian wording (never translated into Amharic) that indicate the Italian aim of controlling Ethiopia's foreign relations, in other words do away with Ethiopia's external sovereignty, and it was only clear that the Italian government attempted to use the clause, Article XVII of the treaty signed on 2 May, as a basis for proclaiming a protectorate over Ethiopia. It was only the Amharic text that embodied the factual agreement". (p.231)

In terms of clarity and context, the outdated and rejected textbook of Ato Tekle Tsadik Mekuria is far better than the chapter under review. The story of the Battle of Adwa which could have illustrated the existence of a strong basis of unity among Ethiopia's many ethnic nationalities, is told in such a way as to create a total confusion on the relevance of the past to the understanding of the present. The section on the Battle of Adwa is reproduced in full and commented on in Appendix 1.

The topics in chapter ten deal with political developments since 1974. It transpires quite clearly that the view of the authors on

Ethiopian history and society is that of shame, contempt and disgust. Even the Battles of Dogali and Adwa are presented in a manner that tended to blame Ethiopian ruling classes for the continued presence of the Italians in Eritrea.

"After defeating the Italian colonial army at Adwa, the ruling landowning class headed by Minilik did not try to pursue and dislodge the defeated and retreating army..."(p. 240-1).

If the authors had read Professor Sven Rubenson's *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, (1976) carefully, they would not have grossly misconstrued the immediate aftermath of Adwa.

It is, however, when the authors describe the period of Haile Selassie that their contempt of Ethiopia and its past comes to the fore. Describing the Ethiopia of Haile Selassie, the authors wrote:

"In social terms, Ethiopia experienced no substantial changes during the half-century of Haile Selassie's totalitarian rule. He was a sort of Bismarck, but without abandoning the class position of feudalism. He became as little bourgeois as possible. He feared and rightly so that capitalist economic development would lead to the development of the working class; open the country to revolutionary ideas; and further the growth of the intelligentsia, who would first wonder at but later find repugnant his deification and greed for riches, power and personal glory".(pp. 251-2)

Such blatantly inaccurate presentation of the past undermines the objectives of education in the eyes of most of teachers and parents. The criticism of the Haile Selassie period ought to be correct because the knowledge of the period is still fresh for many citizens. The attempt towards correct presentation need be strictly pursued if the Ministry of Education believes seriously in the objectives of education, i.e., education for research. The chapters as they stand now do not in any manner reflect the quality of reasoning and research that the educational system wishes to inculcate in the younger generation. Terms and concepts are used in such a careless manner that they even confuse the political activist with a university background. The late Emperor Haile Selassie is described at one time as a "feudal Mussolini aspiring to be a demi-god" and later "a sort of Bismarck, but without abandoning the class position of feudalism".(pp. 251-2) The Ethiopian state is sometimes described as a feudal empire state and sometimes as a feudo-bourgeoise without any attempt to define and explain these difficult political concepts.

The most serious weakness of the chapter concerns the views on the Ethiopian past and those on development. The Eurocentric and USA dominated concepts of development and modernization are wholeheartedly accepted by the authors of the textbook. The MOE and the state leadership seem to suffer a serious inferiority complex – an attitude brought about by the philosophy of modernization and the Marxist politics of rapid and drastic transformation of society. It is indeed legitimate for ruling elites to aspire to implement social and economic policies already tried elsewhere. However, to view one's culture and society in contempt can only result in political and cultural upheaval. In the Ethiopian context it could be strongly argued that the economic and social policies introduced after 1974, which have negatively affected peasant productivity, can to a great extent be traced to the contempt that the intellectual elite entertains for Ethiopia and its past. This can be clearly illustrated by the following passage:

"The feudal system which had dominated the social scene of the country for over many centuries had made the people of Ethiopia remain at a shamefully low level of social development by arresting their socio-economic and political advance and thereby shutting off their creative spirit. Consequently, when Ethiopia's level of social development is examined today in terms of the various scales measuring growth, it is invariably found that she holds the last place in all respects.

In economic development, she is one of those countries which are classified as the poorest in the world. In terms of health, she is one of the most disease-ridden countries of the world. In terms of education, she is one of those countries where mass illiteracy reigns supreme. The same holds true in other areas as well.

As it had been pointed out earlier, the sole factor that accounted for this miserable social condition was the feudal system that had reigned supreme in Ethiopia for a long time. Under this system, land, which is the sole source of livelihood of over 90 per cent of the toiling peasant masses of Ethiopia was owned and controlled by a handful of feudal oligarchs – members of the royal family, the nobility and leaders of religious order. It has been ascertained that 65 per cent of the land was owned by the upper stratum of the ruling feudal aristocracy – members of the royal family, princesses and the nobility. 30 per cent was owned by leaders of religious orders and other collaborators of the exploitative feudal system.

The members of the ruling feudal aristocracy, though they

had owned and controlled 95 per cent of the land, had no connection whatsoever with the process of production. They were rather a collection of lazy, ignorant and arrogant lot. The burden of satisfying their extravagant life style was placed at the shoulder of the broad Ethiopian masses, particularly the toiling peasant masses".(pp. 263-4)

The feudal society that the authors paint in such dark colours was a society that evolved a political state that endured for nearly two thousand years. The feudal society created Ethiopia and maintained its independence through the centuries. It left behind it a culture that is varied and rich. It was a system that succeeded in integrating many different nationalities into a functioning political framework. With the exception of the Era of Princes (Zemene Msafint), our knowledge of which is still inadequate, the political system of "feudal Ethiopia" functioned too well. There are very few countries in the world that have enjoyed such a continuous history.<sup>25</sup>

It is one thing to be aware of the nature and extent of poverty in Ethiopia. It is, however, an entirely different matter to put the responsibility for Ethiopian backwardness solely on the political system – one of several variables in a social organization.

From the 1960's onwards, Ethiopia has been, according to the scales of measurement developed in Europe and North America, one of the poorest countries. Are these scales of measuring development so universal that the leaders and educators of the new nations have no alternative, if they want to improve their score, but to shape their policies exclusively along these lines? Although the ethnocentric bias of putting nations on a modernization scale where Europe and the USA occupy the highest rung on the ladder has been pointed out, the impact of the critique has not filtered down to the level of social policy.

If we omit the last chapter, as it is related more to political education than to history, secondary students study only two chapters of Ethiopian history during their four years of schooling. No Ethiopian history is taught in grades eleven and twelve. Under such circumstances it can hardly be said that Ethiopian history is taught in Ethiopian secondary schools. The two chapters, as we have seen, are composed in such a manner that they hardly provide knowledge, national pride, patriotism, or an historical perspective. On the contrary, the impact of the chapters on students could be highly negative because of the minor importance given to Ethiopian history. This dimension is fully discussed in the following chapter.

#### *Texts for grade eleven and twelve*

The textbooks for grades eleven and twelve deal exclusively with world history, where Ethiopia and her history have very little place. Accusing the policy of the Imperial regime, the Ergese authors wrote that the "... responsibility for curriculum development was entrusted to foreign advisors who turned Ethiopia into their political, cultural and economic dependency," presumably through their manipulation of the curriculum and the educational system. "Therefore," continued the Ergese authors, "modern Ethiopian education has pitifully reflected the French system when the advisors were French, the Egyptian when the advisors were Egyptians, the British when the advisors were British, and the American system when the advisors were Americans".<sup>26</sup> The Ergese authors did not try to substantiate their allegations. The records of the Ministry of Education that I examined tell an entirely different story.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the situation which the Ergese authors complained about has not changed since the Revolution. There may not be any Russian advisors at the Ministry of Education, but *the history textbooks for grade eleven and twelve are photographic reproductions of a Russian book on world history by Professor A.Z. Manfred.*

It could be argued that Professor A. Z. Manfred's book, *A Short History of the World*, published in Moscow in 1974, meets the ideological needs of Ethiopia. It is, however, difficult to assess this matter since the ideological needs have not been clearly defined. My complaints about all the history textbooks (in use in Ethiopia) in general and the last two textbooks in particular deal with the aspects presented below.

Firstly, the curriculum pays far too little attention to Ethiopia and Ethiopian world view. The curriculum pays more attention to European and American history than the curriculum of any developed state. It would be naive indeed to try to explain the little attention devoted to Ethiopian and African history on the grounds of proletarian internationalism. We live in the era of nations and nationalism, where the task of national curriculum is to enhance nation-building. This task is pursued with great efficiency and competence in the developed countries where one might consider these nations to be beyond the need for it.

However, in countries such as Ethiopia, where the problems of nation-building dominate the entire attention of the state, the educational system is far from fulfilling its task. *The fact that only two chapters out of a total of 26 chapters (or 98 pages of 918) deal with Ethiopian history can only give the impression that Ethiopian history is not*

influence. Thus, the Japanese imperialists used the Anfu clique, then at the head of the central government. Yet another group of Chinese militarists co-operated with the Japanese in the Northeastern China; this group was headed by general Chang Tso-lin, in the past a bandit, at present engaged in openly plundering the multi-million population of several provinces in China and in endless warfare with rival war-lords. And Central China was the domain of the Chihli clique supported by the British and American imperialists, who were engaged in bitter rivalry with the Japanese militarists for domination in China.

The seizure of the state power in Peking by the Chihli clique in the middle of 1920 was an episode in that rivalry.

Meantime, despite repressions, resentment grew among the masses against the foreign imperialist grip on China and the lack of unity in the country resulting from the endless wars among the war-lords. Demands were voiced with increasing insistence for the return to China of territories ceded by virtue of the unequal treaties signed by the country's mercenary government with Japan, Britain, France, and other imperialist powers. The republican government of Sun Yat-sen, set up in Kwangchow (Canton), in the south of China, in the autumn of 1917, was gaining in popularity. It had become the focal point of the anti-imperialist struggles, and it held out, in spite of all the efforts of the imperialist powers and their Chinese agents to topple it by military pressure, counter-revolutionary revolts, etc., and in spite of the fact that Sun Yat-sen was twice forced to leave Kwangchow. Early in 1923 Sun Yat-sen came back to Kwangchow to stay, and the government he headed became the real stronghold of the Chinese people's struggle of liberation, largely through the efforts of the Chinese Communists.

The Communist Party of China was founded in July 1921. The CPC constituent congress met in Shanghai in deepest secrecy. Chinese historians describe the founding of the CPC as the concentrated expression of the influence of the Russian October Revolution on the Chinese people's liberation movement. The Second Congress met a year later to adopt a decision on the Party joining the Communist International. If the activity of the working class increased over 1922 and 1923, it was due to communist influence. Notable developments took place in these years and among them, the seamen's strike at Hong Kong and the strike of the Peking-Hankow Railway workers.

Sun Yat-sen was a convinced democrat. When he returned to Kwangchow he turned more resolutely than ever to the masses for support. He realised what power was latent in the fledgling Communist Party and adopted a policy of closer co-operation with it. There were no legal restrictions on the Party's activities

*Reproduction of a page from History for Grade Eleven*

as important as European or American history. This, in turn, raises the question as to the progress that countries like Ethiopia are alleged to have made in the domain of self-reliance, national pride, etc. The colonialists, it should perhaps be recalled, were accused for inculcating a feeling of inferiority through the simple but effective mechanism of ignoring African values, culture, and history in their colonial educational programme.

Colonialism has come and gone, and Ethiopia was hardly colonized. In its virtual ignorance of Ethiopian history, however, the Ethiopian curriculum has a strikingly colonial character. The tendency to view development as synonymous with modernization, the educational practice of the Imperial regime, and the obsession of the Post-Revolution state with drastic and rapid development along the East European model seem all to contribute to this sad state of affairs.

Education in general and the teaching of history in particular must be firmly anchored in Ethiopian history and culture as preconditions for self-reliant development and for the cultivation of a population with a common identity. During the Imperial era, the state pursued the ideology of making education reflect the country's historical and cultural heritage. This was, however, totally frustrated in practice, due to the dominant position of expatriate teachers and the use of English as a medium of instruction that discriminated against the use, as well as the development, of teaching materials in the language of the society. The policy of the post-1974 state, on the other hand, is based on the aspiration of making education meet the objective demands of the nation and the ideological needs of Ethiopian society. To the extent that these demands are defined, they refer to the production of trained manpower and the spread of Marxist-Leninist ideology among the young generation so as to ensure the continued leadership of the ideology of the working classes. Although the clause "the objective needs of the country" could be interpreted to imply the anchoring of education to the cultural, political, social, and history of the country, it remains a task for the future. As things stand now, the educational programme (curriculum and media of instruction) reflect very little the history and culture of the country.

From the pedagogical point of view, the textbooks for grade eleven and twelve are of little value. These volumes were not written for secondary students but rather for highly educated political activists. The volumes contain hundreds of pieces of information that hardly make any sense unless the reader is in a position, through earlier reading, to put them into their context.

Both textbooks contain no review questions and guidelines to help



students understand the texts. Given the difficulty that teachers and students encounter with English, the conversion of a non-textbook into a textbook in an environment where such knowledge is neither relevant nor current can only contribute to the widening of the gap between the home, the school, and the state.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The salient points of the chapter have their origin in the discussions I had with the history teachers at Entoto Comprehensive secondary school, who dispassionately informed me about the crisis of education. I am greatly indebted to them.

<sup>2</sup> I made the observations between April and May, 1988. During this period I talked mainly with teachers of history and with school directors. I also attended classes. The main purpose was to gain insight into how education was imparted.

<sup>3</sup> The following subjects are taught in grades nine and ten. A lesson period is made up of forty minutes. Amharic, 4 periods; English, 4 periods; Mathematics, 3 periods; Biology, 2 periods; Physics, 2 periods; Chemistry, 2 periods; Political Education, 1 period, Home Economics, 2 periods; General Business, 2 periods; Production Technology, 1 period; History, 2 periods; Geography, 2 periods; and Agriculture, 2 periods a week. In contrast, the following subjects were taught in grades nine and ten prior to 1978. Math, 6 periods; Science, 6 periods; History, 4 periods; Geography, 4 periods; Amharic, 5 periods; English, 6 periods, and Physical Education, 1 period a week. Moreover, a lesson period was 55 minutes.

<sup>4</sup> A central register of names of students is kept at the director's office. In the beginning of the year a student is told the number under which his or her name is recorded. Henceforth, if a teacher wants to find out the identity of his students, he or she begins by asking the identification number. Many stories are told of how students confuse their teachers by switching numbers.

<sup>5</sup> Information supplied by teachers both at Entoto and Minilik schools. The teachers all had a decade of teaching experience.

<sup>6</sup> From 1978 to 1984 the work force of the industrial sector increased from 63,000 to 80,000 or at the rate of 2430 workers per year. See International Labour Organisation, *Youth Employment Programmes in Africa. A Comparative Sub-Regional Study: The Case of Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, 1986, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Many departments of the Public Sector, e. g. the Ministry of Education, can not be maintained without external financing, with the inevitable implication that the evolution and implementation of policies have to take into account the interests of donors.

<sup>8</sup> Mention can be made here of the original research on this and related areas by Desalegn Rahmato. See for instance his studies on: "Moral Crusaders and Incipient Capitalists: Mechanized Agriculture and its Critics", in *Proceedings of the Third Annual Seminar of the Department of History*, edited by Bahru Zewdw, Addis Ababa University, 1986, pp. 69-90; "The Political Economy of Development in Ethiopia", in *Afro-Marxist Regimes: Ideology and Public Policy*, edited by Edmond J. Keller and Donald Rothchild, Boulder Colorado, 1987, pp. 155-79.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Education, *Report of the Current Operation of the Education System with special reference to Secondary Education and the Twelfth grade Examination*, Addis Ababa, 1966, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Education, *Objectives and Directives of Ethiopian Education*, Addis Ababa, 1980, vol. 1, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Gray L. Cowan, James O'Connell and David G. Scanlon, *Education and Nation-Building in Africa*, New York, 1965.

<sup>12</sup> The Ethiopian student movement has been thoroughly studied by Randi Ronning Balsvik, *Haile Sellassie's Students: the Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1977*, Michigan State University, Lansing, Michigan, 1985. Assessing the commitment of the student movement, Randi Balsvik wrote, "Peaceful political existence and dialogue between groups were unknown to Ethiopia and within the university. In such an oppressive atmosphere only the most dedicated, the true believers, were able to prevail. Yet for all the movement's preference for theoretical analysis rather practical action, only the most short-sighted observers or confirmed cynics would suggest that the student revolutionaries were not motivated by profound social concern. The had a sense of historical mission, of being instruments in an inevitable process of change, of playing a role no other group was prepared to perform in Ethiopian society". (p. 295)

Balsvik is most certainly right regarding motivation of the movement, but it can not be denied that the movement was anti-democratic and repressive. The movement's perception of Marxism-Leninism and of its role as a vanguard were vulgar and infantile.

<sup>13</sup> See the articles by Hans Bosse and Hartmut Elsenhans in *Journal of Peace Research*, 12:4 (1975) 315-329 and 293-313 respectively.

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Education, *History for Grade Nine*, Addis Ababa, 1980.

<sup>15</sup> In the beginning of this century it was common to distinguish peoples through a series of pseudo-scientific criteria such as race. See for instance, Seligman, *The Races of Africa*. The only criterion for distinguishing the Oromo from other ethnic groups is linguistic. The Oromo do not belong to any Hamitic or Cushitic race, since there is none, but to a linguistic group known as Cushitic. The people who speak Cushitic languages in Ethiopia include the Beja in the extreme north of the country and the Somalis.

<sup>16</sup> Asmerom Leggesse, *Gada. Three Approaches to the Study of an African Society*, New York, 1973.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> *History for grade nine*, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> See Mordechai Abir, *Era of the Princes*; Herbert Lewis,

<sup>20</sup> *History for grade nine*, p. 80.

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Education, *History for grade nine*, p. 95.

<sup>22</sup> The periodization of Ethiopian History has been developed by the Ethiopian Church whose members were the main royal chroniclers. The decline of the power of the "king of kings" between ca. 1760 and 1855, due to the emergence of a new Oromo hegemony, was bitterly resented by the Church. The Church had a long historical connection with the institution of the "king of kings". The Church



mistrusted the Christianity of the Oromo rulers -- whose conversion was of recent origin and therefore, superficial. New ground is about to be broken by Shiferaw Bekele, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, whose current research could undoubtedly result in a major reinterpretation of the period.

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Education, *History. Grade Ten*, first ed. 1980, reprinted, 1983.

<sup>24</sup> The Italian Occupation of Eritrea etc.

<sup>25</sup> On the historical role of Ethiopia's institutions for the maintenance of the country's independence see Haggai Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Challenge of Independence*, Boulder Colorado, 1986, in particular the first chapter on Ethiopia and the Challenge of the West, pp. 3-18.

<sup>26</sup> *Report of the Workshop on Curriculum Development and Teaching-Learning Process*, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance the *Report on the Current Operation of the Education System*, Addis Ababa, 1966, where attempts were made to evolve a curriculum suitable to Ethiopia.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Implications of the Education Crisis for Ethiopia and its Society

Although the implications of the education crisis affect every dimension of the society, for purposes of illustration I have chosen here to discuss only three areas. These are i) the growth of incompetence in running the affairs of the state; ii) the continued growth of ethnic, regional and class conflicts; and, iii) the progressive growth of state authoritarianism.

#### *The Growth of Incompetence in running the affairs of state*

The main function of education is to train people who are competent enough to run the affairs of the country. The expectation that the educational system should produce competent people for the all-encompassing bureaucracy is stronger in countries who pursue a socialist path of development. Therefore, in the Ethiopian case, in addition to the production of highly motivated and qualified civil servants, the education sector is expected to produce productive members in the socialized means of production. As it currently operates, however, the education sector is far from being in a position to meet these expectations. In the following paragraphs I shall attempt to outline a scenario concerning the range of incompetence and some probable implications.

In spite of the remarkable progress made in the field of education, Ethiopia of today is on the whole poorer and more backward than Ethiopia of a hundred years ago. This seemingly contradictory view can partly be explained in the following manner. The concept "poor" and "backward" are used in a relative sense in that Ethiopian backwardness and poverty is measured in relation to European progress. Ethiopia is indeed one of the poorest nations of the world, if we subscribe to the theory of modernization which puts nations on a measurement scale. And the Ethiopian government as well as the elite is fully committed to this theory. A hundred years ago, however, the gap between Ethiopia and the western world was certainly not as wide as it is now.

The main difference between the bureaucracy of the developed states and those of the underdeveloped deals with the competence to

evaluate, plan, and implement strategies designed to strike an acceptable balance between competing interests. The bureaucracies of the developed countries show a remarkable degree of self-reflection, historical consciousness, and a striking readiness to adopt methods developed and experimented elsewhere.

In the Ethiopian context, the bureaucracy is expected to concentrate on two closely interrelated functions. The first function is to assess the flood of innovations from the developed world and control the importation of foreign methods which are not likely to be easily assimilated. Bureaucratic competence, in this case, needs to be very high since the range of choice is indeed wide. The second function of the bureaucracy lies in its competence to develop and implement policies that enhance nation-building and the development of the country. I shall now illustrate the functions of the bureaucracy and the desired level of competence by taking an example each from the education and the economic planning sectors.

Since the 1960's, Ethiopian education has been criticized as irrelevant to the needs of the country. Ethiopian students knew more of the histories of Europe than of their own country. The implementation of an indiscriminately imported curriculum produced a youth that hated its past and was largely incapable of comprehending the dynamics of social, economic, and political developments. Very little work in terms of addressing the problems of education and nation-building was undertaken during this period.

In spite of the unrealistic expectation placed on education as the key to the solution of the country's underdevelopment, the situation since 1974 has not greatly changed. Moreover, the expertise within the bureaucracy seems to be unable to show in clear terms the limits of uncontrolled expansion and thus recommend appropriate policy options.

The repeatedly stated desire by the government for close links between education and the objective needs of the country remain unfulfilled, I believe, due to the absence of qualified personnel within the bureaucratic machinery of the education sector. In defence of the bureaucracy, however, it needs to be emphasized that it is far easier for the politicians to place a demand on the education sector to provide an education that meets the objective needs of the country than to provide sufficient funds and goodwill. What are these objective needs? Although it might be possible to define these in a more rhetorical and mechanical manner, a real knowledge of the objective needs of the country requires a wide acquaintance with the histories and cultures of its inhabitants. Judging from available and accessible knowledge on

Ethiopia, it is not in the least surprising that the Curriculum department prefers to rely on an imported programme.

Another area where the absence of a competent administrative institution produced undesirable results was in the policy and implementation of land reform. Although the need for a land reform in south and southwestern Ethiopia has been widely known since the late 1950's, there were hardly any realistic proposals as to the type of land reform. From 1968 onwards, the slogan of "Land to the Tiller" developed by university and secondary school students existed as one type of alternative for land reform. The fall of the Old Regime and the beginnings of tenants' stirrings in the south and southeast of the country brought the question of land reform to the fore. The land reform of 1975 would probably have looked different had there been a bureaucratic machinery adequately acquainted with the complexities of land reform and with Ethiopia's land owning systems. The measures that the government has recently initiated do, I believe, support the argument.

As it turned out, the land reform introduced a high element of insecurity by making peasants feel less secure of their land ownership. The nationalization of land as opposed to expropriation of excess land dealt a serious blow to individual mechanized agriculture. The land reform designed to avoid a landless peasantry, went against the historically experienced pattern of social and economic development by tying virtually all peasants even more firmly to tiny and insufficient plots. The land reform increased fragmentary land-use, thereby worsening the ecological degradation of the landscape.

The above examples illustrate the degree of the absence and or incompetence of the administrative and policy making institutions. The education sector continues to implement an imported (neo-colonial) curriculum where Ethiopia and its society occupy peripheral positions. In spite of the egalitarian and democratic ideals that inspired it, the land reform of 1975 was an ill-planned and poorly implemented policy. Such sweeping policies could only be attempted in a country where the bureaucracy is unable to come up with alternatives that meet the interests of the conflicting social groupings.

In about 25 years, the bureaucracy will be manned largely by people who passed through the educational system between 1975 and 1995. This generation will be entrusted with administering an ancient and complex society. The responsibility of managing the external affairs of the country will also fall upon the shoulders of this generation. Indeed a great deal will be transmitted from the passing generation to the succeeding generation through apprenticeship and training, but many

decisions have to be made by the new generation. In view of the manner and quality of Ethiopian education, my fear is that the succeeding generations will find it extremely hard, if not impossible, to evolve and implement social and economic policies which would enhance nation-building and development. A generation that barely knows its history can hardly be expected to run a country with historical consciousness.

The tradition of bureaucratic inefficiency and incompetency can be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century when Ethiopia embarked on the path of modernization along a western European model. Emperor Minilik (ruled between 1889 and 1913) is quite rightly considered as the monarch who first introduced the structures of modern organization of the society. A point of no return was reached after the downfall of the Italian rule in 1941, although the Ethiopian state (1941-74) tried unsuccessfully to combine the traditional system with the forms and structures demanded by modernization. The official policy during the period of Emperor Haile Sellassie was that Ethiopia, as an ancient and civilized society, should opt for a carefully selected adaptation of European ideas and systems. In practice, however, the Imperial regime did very little to inculcate respect for Ethiopian traditions of social and political organization. It left the curriculum and most of the teaching in secondary schools to expatriates who quite naturally spread the gospel of modernization.

In comparison, the policy of the Revolutionary state is different as it is fully committed to the modernization of the Ethiopian society. Modernization of a society implies by necessity the modernization of the bureaucracy. While the structural dimension of bureaucracy is a task easily achieved (e.g., the establishment of departments, committees etc.), the task of evolving a responsive and responsible corps of planners, administrators, and policy makers requires a long period accompanied by consistent and rigorous execution of plans. The whole concept of modernization (both the Western and Eastern European models) has had its critics in the past and is even today being seriously challenged in the Middle East. A critical assessment of the theory and concept of modernization shall not be attempted since the main concern of this study is to discuss whether the Ethiopian educational system, as it operates now, can lay down the basis for a dynamic and efficient generation out of which competent bureaucrats can be recruited.

The educational system, as it functions now, can not fulfill the expectations placed on it for two reasons. Firstly, compared to the number of enrolled students, the budget allocated for education is far

too small to provide adequate education. The 1988 budget of 350 million *birr* earmarked to educate a student population of 3,726,000 is inadequate by any standard of measurement. The budget that the Ethiopian state allocated for education for 1988 might be sufficient to properly educate about one third of the present student population. The state has expanded the education sector far beyond its capability to manage it adequately. In the process, the education sector, as described in the earlier chapter, finds itself on the verge of virtual disintegration.

Secondly, the content of Ethiopian education (social science in general and history in particular) does not impart national pride and patriotism. The education content as well as modern Ethiopian culture is poorly organized to disseminate knowledge of Ethiopian history and society.

As the budget for education is limited by the tax revenue capability of the state, it can hardly be expected that the state will be in a position to spend more on education than it presently does. Yet the commitment of the state towards the expansion and equitable distribution of education can be clearly seen from its efforts to secure several World Bank loans.

The Imperial regime was criticized for implementing an elitist policy that tended to maintain regional and sexual imbalances. The criticism that can be made against the educational policies of the post-1974 state is that the aspiration to implement a democratic educational policy has resulted in the drastic expansion of the education sector at the cost of educational quality. It is not, therefore, the policy that is under scrutiny but the manner of its implementation that, in turn, has led to a serious decline of educational quality.

One of the many serious problems that Ethiopia may face in the foreseeable future is the absence of an efficient bureaucracy. The essential characteristics of a bureaucracy are a result of a political system with considerable tradition of continuity behind it and of an educational system that gives priority to quality rather than to quantity.

#### *Continued regional/ethnic conflicts*

The educational sector is producing hundreds of thousands of students, most of whom will be unemployed, at a period when regional and ethnic conflicts have reached a critical stage. In 1987, there were 326,000 students enrolled in the secondary streams. This figure increased to 378,700 in 1988, which surpasses by a wide margin the peak envisaged by the Ten Year Development Plan. Not more than 20

per cent of those students can hope to find employment upon completion.

The realization among students and teachers that job opportunities are extremely rare, remains one of the factors that reduce motivation in the schools. The growing pool of unemployed and unemployable secondary school leavers is a well-known problem that is simply beyond the scope of the state to manage. The largely non-monetized economy and the strong ties between relatives has tended to absorb a good number of secondary leavers. Another safety valve has been the possibility of migrating abroad due to the war situation in the north and to the push and pull factors created by the considerable Ethiopian population in Western Europe and North America. The migrating group is, however, a very small fraction of the unemployed youth in the country.

Although no correlation can be said to exist between the regional/ethnic conflicts in the north and the lack of employment opportunities for secondary graduates, it could certainly be argued that the pool of unemployed secondary graduates provides a receptive ground for mobilization activities by regionalist and ethnic forces. Trained for bureaucratic employment in the modern sector, secondary graduates, after a considerable period of unemployment, tend to lose respect for the state and society. Many of them may not physically join regional or ethnic forces against the state but may nevertheless enhance anti-state forces either through covert sympathy with the latter or by indifference. Since conflicts between regions for political supremacy have a very long history in Ethiopia, the existence of hundreds of thousands of unemployed secondary graduates could very well provide a fertile ground for the continuation of the phenomenon.

Most secondary students in general and unemployed secondary graduates in particular are in an extremely vulnerable position vis a vis the advocates of regional and ethnic autonomy. Aware of the legitimating role of history, the regionalist/secessionist forces pay due attention to rewriting their history as well as in popularizing it. Such histories are written with the aim of justifying the goals which these forces represent, as well as negating prevailing interpretations used by the state. In most cases, e.g. the Eritrean case, the argumentation of the regionalist/ethnic forces is far better organized than those put forward by the Ethiopian state. I have observed many cases where secondary graduates were left defenceless when confronted with the histories written by the regionalist/secessionist organizations.

It is indeed a difficult task to administer countries like Ethiopia, inhabited by ethnic groupings with a long history of conflict and

cooperation behind them. State policies could easily be interpreted as favouring one or several ethnic interests against others. Moreover, a low degree of literacy and the predominant status of oral communication tends to put more weight on certain types of information, e.g. those mediated through ethnic channels. The administration of such countries, therefore, demands a ruling elite that is homogeneous in its cultural formation and highly competent in the histories and cultures of its populations.

By no means the products of the educational system, regional and ethnic conflicts will most certainly continue in the future, due to the close connection between regional and class conflicts. What is preoccupying about the imagined possibility of continued regional and ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia is, however, the culture of conflict resolution with its heavy reliance on armed confrontation. The resolution of a conflict, either before it spills into an armed confrontation or before such a confrontation has brought social disaster, requires a bureaucracy capable enough of managing the interests of the conflicting parties. Regional/ethnic conflicts are universal phenomena; they are mainly distinguished by the methods used for their resolution.

Regional/ethnic conflicts are not phenomena whose rise and decline can be easily attributed to the educational system or to the socialization of the new generation. If the history of Europe can be read in order to shed some light on the history of regional/ethnic conflicts, it can then be said that African states (including Ethiopia) with their recent history of modern statehood would in the future pass through many waves of regional and ethnic conflicts. The task of education as well as of the present generation would then be to devise strategies that tend to minimize the intensity of such conflicts, if and when they do arise.

#### *Growth of authoritarianism*

If the long and hard struggle for democracy waged by Latin American states from the early nineteenth century onwards can be used as an indicator, it would then not be unrealistic to argue that for many decades to come, the state in Ethiopia will continue to maintain a highly authoritarian character. In concrete terms, this means that decision-making will remain concentrated to a small circle; that the state will interfere in the organization and marketing of agricultural production; and that it will also maintain large security and armed forces. These draconian aspects that give the state its authoritarian

character, are mostly of a structural nature. The concentration of decision-making around a charismatic leader or within a very small group, can be explained by the absence of a political culture where delegation of power and criticism from below do not entail loss of career or life. The urge to concentrate all power is also a result of poverty of political culture at a wider level of the society. Virtually every critique against the post-Revolution state is framed with the crude but clear intention of replacing the government, thereby acquiring state power.

As for the interference in the marketing of agricultural production, the reasons are of a complex nature. African states, including Ethiopia, find themselves in the position that their population as whole and urban population in particular, is growing faster than food production. A recurring story in Africa during the last fifteen years has been the continuous harassment of the peasants to produce more at successively deteriorating prices. Many African countries, including Ethiopia, produce less food than what is consumed. In such circumstances, any government in power has no alternative but to impose an inflexible price control system designed to guarantee food supply to urban areas. This is because of the close relationship between the political stability of the government, urban unrest, and food supply. It is indeed possible to stimulate food production through regulations designed to give the peasants more freedom in selling their produce at competitive prices while at the same time ensuring the production of sufficient quantities of basic food crops. This would, however, require a bureaucratic machinery that is competent and flexible.

The dominant position that the security and armed forces occupy in Ethiopia also has a peculiar explanation. Since at least the thirteenth century, Ethiopia has always been a military state. It is only recently (1984) that the country has begun to be ruled by a non-military institution, that is, the Workers Party of Ethiopia. In spite of this innovation – one that would hopefully institutionalize transfer of power, thus ensuring continuity and stability – the security and armed forces will remain large. The regional/ethnic conflict in the north, the yet unresolved boundary dispute with the Republic of Somalia, the parasitic relationship between the cities and the countryside, and the presence of hundreds of thousands of unemployed citizens will continue to necessitate the maintenance of security and armed forces which are far more expensive than any other sector.

The growth or decline of authoritarianism depends to a great extent on the development priorities of the government and the ruling elite. As far as the WPE and its critics are concerned, these priorities are

clearly defined: Ethiopia shall be modernized rapidly along the European (currently Eastern) model. This will entail the restructuring of society and economy from above – an effort that has been attempted since 1974.

However, irrespective of which variant (western or eastern European) Ethiopia chooses to imitate, modernization will be carried out in an authoritarian manner. It is indeed possible to conceptualize an alternative path to social development. It would, however, be extremely difficult to articulate and implement it, due to the unassailable edifice of self-righteousness that the West and East European systems have constructed around their models of social development.

The crisis of Ethiopian education does not in any significant manner affect the intensity of authoritarianism. It is when we reach a stage of distinguishing types of authoritarianism that the role of education becomes significant. Whereas the development of the economy would in the long run result in the liberalization of society, the existence of an educational infrastructure that is responsive to the objective needs of the country would most certainly hasten the decline of authoritarianism.

#### *Concluding remarks*

As the technological gap between Ethiopia and the developed world continues to widen, far more pressure will be placed on the educational sector – an institution entrusted with the "creation" of scientifically oriented citizens. I think it is realistic to expect the educational sector to play a decisive role in the renovation and reconstruction of the country but only when the state and society create a conducive environment under which the sector can operate. By conducive environment I refer mainly to the recruitment of competent teachers, the strict correlation between budget and enrollment, increased teacher participation, and continued effort to focus curriculum on Ethiopia and its objective needs.

The educational sector can achieve its objectives better if it is clearly understood by society at large that education is only one instrument that can contribute to nation-building and development. Education is a dependent variable: it does not hold the key to the solution of Ethiopia's multiple problems. Whereas a system of education that is responsive to the objective needs of the country would undoubtedly result in the emergence of citizens capable of analysing their social



environment, the contrary would be true of a system where educational content, relevance and quality are not emphasised.

The new century will require a ruling elite (those who manage the bureaucracy) with several indispensable qualities. These include: i) knowledge of the history of Ethiopia and its inhabitants; ii) patriotism and national pride; iii) appreciation of the gap between Ethiopia and the developed world; and, iv) respect for individual initiative and "traditional" wisdom. I am fully aware that the argument for the creation of a ruling elite can be interpreted as elitist as well as anti-democratic. However, if the objective of the Ethiopian government and its ruling elites is the modernization of society along the European model, then, I believe, that there is no other alternative.

The educational sector could indeed be expected to be engaged in the inculcation of most of these qualities in the younger generation, but only when the state ensures that enrollment and financial resources are matched. This will involve a substantial reform of the educational sector, as well as of its underlying philosophy. Reform, however, ought to be preceded by an extensive public debate and discussion. An open debate and discussion would have several advantages. Firstly, it would greatly increase the faith and confidence of the population (mostly urban and educated), in the state since they would be directly participating in the evolution and formation of a social policy. Secondly, the reform measures – a result of an extensive debate and discussion – should be easily implemented. Thirdly, the debate would be an extremely useful exercise in the democratic process – a goal enshrined in the constitution.

Failure to reform the educational sector would without doubt be felt in a growing inability of the ruling elite to define the relations between Ethiopia and the outside world. Such inability would in turn compel the ruling elite to seek a progressive intervention of expatriate organizations to assist in the management of the affairs of the country. The journey towards a neo-colonial existence could then be said to have begun. More pre-occupying would be the extreme shortage of competent manpower needed for the understanding of the state, the society, the people and its history.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the leaders of the new Republic is their serious commitment to leaving behind them an Ethiopia better equipped to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. The means that they have thus far used to shake up a "backward society" to modernity can certainly be questioned but not the intention. However, intention alone is not enough. The methods

and the means used for a realization of a goal are as important as the goal itself.

If the educational crisis continues, the implications for the country and society will be far reaching. The democratization of Ethiopia – the foundations of which are being laid down – will be made exceedingly difficult. Nation-building – a process that has been going on since the beginning of this century – will suffer a serious crisis. Both the Party (WPE) and the government will be staffed by civil servants who lack the competence to fulfill the responsibilities with which they will be entrusted. Backwardness – a phenomenon characterized by the absence of a competent and homogenous ruling elite – will continue to persist. Unless substantial reforms are soon worked out, Ethiopia will face the twenty-first century with social, political, and economic contradictions that could endanger its existence as a united political entity.

In a desperate search for the means to overcome backwardness, the Ethiopian government saw education as the magic formula. That education was perceived in this manner, as we shall see in the next chapter, was neither the invention of the Ethiopian state nor its fault. The expansion of the educational sector far beyond the country's financial resources and the implementation of a highly irrelevant curriculum led to the serious decline of the sector with far reaching implications. Although a great deal of precious time has been lost, a substantially reformed educational sector could very well lay the foundation for the dynamic development of Ethiopian society.

## Some General Recommendations on Carrying Out Educational Reform

Since the beginning of this decade the Ethiopian government has felt the need for a substantial reform of the education sector. The 1983 resolution for an investigation into the decline of quality (Ergese study) and the goal envisaged in the Ten Year Development Plan of the very slow growth of secondary education are sufficient indicators of this concern. However, if the education sector is to play a significant role in nation-building and the overall development of the country, the question of reform needs to be confronted more vigorously and consistently.

It is hardly an exaggeration to argue that the destiny of the country depends on how well the leadership of the succeeding generation is able to simultaneously modernize and maintain political and cultural stability. Indeed, the crisis in education is not limited to Ethiopia alone; it is an African phenomenon. But it ought to be clear that the reform of the education sector can only be carried out individually by the separate states.

The present crisis is first of all a result of the expansion of the education sector far beyond the financial resources of the country to manage it effectively. Secondly, it is a result of the irrelevant and inappropriate curriculum.

One of the factors that led to the rapid expansion of education, irrespective of quality and relevance, was the belief in the role of education in national development. Education was, and still is, perceived essential in terms of human investment for economic and social development. However, education as a precondition for development is a misconception of its role and potential. Before the task of educational reform can be confronted, it is important that these and other misconceptions are thoroughly discussed.

The origin of one of the most serious and pervasive misconceptions can be traced to a seminal study, "Investment in Human Capital," published in 1961 by Professor Theodore Shultz. Written at a period when most African countries were in the process of gaining their independence, Shultz's article had a major influence on the formation and implementation of educational policies of the new states. The tone of optimism in which it was written and the overflowing confidence of

the author on the positive role of education for development resulted in the distortion and vulgarization of Shultz' ideas. What were these ideas that still continue to shape policies on education?

Primarily concerned in explaining the large increase in U.S. national income on the period between the 1930 and 1950, Shultz came to the surprising conclusion that the increase in national income was in fact an income representing a return for education of the labour force. In other words, it was because the American labour population had invested capital (money) in health and education that the national income could rise dramatically. Shultz' daring assessment that up to 50 per cent of the hitherto unexplained rise in earnings of labour could be explained by the returns on the additional education of workers transformed education into a magic formula which, independent of other variables, could bring about economic growth.<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of the close connection between the investment in education and increase in national income, Shultz persuasively argued that the developed world assist the "less developed" countries to invest more in human capital. Commenting on the dominant aid pattern, e.g., to transfer capital for physical goods, Shultz pleaded: "Some growth of course can be had from the increase in more conventional capital even though the labor that is available is lacking both in skill and knowledge. But the rate of growth will be seriously limited. It is simply not possible to have the fruits of a modern agriculture and the abundance of modern industry without making large investments in human beings."

Since then, Shultz has continued to write more forcefully on the economic return on investments in human capital. In his Nobel lecture (1980) Shultz argued that the decisive factors of production in improving the welfare of the poor people are not space, energy, and cropland, but "the improvements in population quality."<sup>2</sup>

Shultz is most certainly right in his assessment of the connection between additional education of the labour force and increase in national income during the 1930-50 period in the United States. But I think Shultz's argumentation pays little attention to the role of economic growth for education. Given that the early industrialization of Europe, as Shultz recognises, did not depend on investments in the labour force, the economy of a given nation has to reach a certain stage of growth before investments in human capital can begin to make national economic sense. This remark may appear of minor significance in the context of the increase of American national income, but not in the context of the developing world.

In spite of a serious lack of reliable data, some attempt can be made

to illustrate the primacy of economic growth. Between 1974 and 1988, the Ethiopian secondary school system produced just over 400,000 graduates. The impact of the presence of a considerable middle level trained manpower can be expected to be either seen or felt in the economy. Although it is difficult to assess their impact on the performance of the modern sector, it can be argued (with a greater degree of confidence) that the impact of these graduates on the rural economy is (especially on agricultural production) of very little significance. In fact agricultural production continues to show a yearly decline since the beginning of 1980's.

There are two reasons for this paradoxical situation. Firstly, the rural policy in general and agricultural policy in particular have thus far failed to attract some of the secondary graduates to invest their knowledge (their invested capital) in this sector. Secondly, most of the secondary graduates, as we can deduce from the curriculum and its implementation, were not provided with an education that might have enabled them to benefit from it. In Professor Shultz' terminology, far too little capital was invested in the students. Moreover, far too many secondary graduates trained for the modern sector were poured into a predominantly rural and agrarian economy. There was no balance between the growth of the modern sector and the growth of the education sector.

Professor Shultz' understanding of education as investment in human capital was empirically limited to the education system of the United States. He was remotely aware of the problems of quality, relevance, and supply and demand that confront most developing countries. Moreover, his understanding of education as the acquisition of relevant knowledge that enables those who possess it to organize their lives in a qualitatively superior manner assumes that what is taught is appropriate and relevant – a major problem affecting the education sector in Ethiopia today. Shultz' usage of the term "education" without any qualification (as to quality, relevance) has given rise to a serious misconception as to its role and potential.

For education to be an investment in human capital, it should first be appropriate and relevant. Secondly, it is necessary to have a conducive environment where most of those who complete their schooling have some opportunity to put what they have learned into practice. As long as these conditions are lacking, it would be a serious misconception to view education as an instrument for development. It would also be a serious misconception to perceive it as an independent variable coming well before the economic policies that govern a given society.

The expansion of the education sector regardless of quality and relevance and the absorption capacity of the economy would only result in the creation of a pool of unemployable citizens with expectations that could not be met by that society. To put it more concretely, the production of over a million secondary school graduates, (under the present circumstances in the next fifteen years) would neither create the basis for development nor be considered as human investment. This is largely because of the serious shortcomings in their training and of the rigidity of the economic system.<sup>3</sup>

The first misconception that has to be dealt with through a series of written and oral discussions is that education does not hold the key to the economic and social development of the country. Development is first and foremost dependent on the economic policies of the government, on the stability of the political system, and on the nature of property relations. Development is a short hand term we use to describe the inputs of many individuals to improve their socio-economic conditions.

Education can indeed be instrumental in increasing the tempo of development but only when it satisfies the needs and demands of people already engaged in production. However, this type of education can not be developed and implemented in advance. It can be argued that it is a waste of resources to teach, for instance, agriculture to the urban youth as long as it is known that future opportunities for many of them to become farmers are minimal. On the contrary, it would make a great deal of sense to take education into the countryside and teach agriculture to peasants who are already practising it. But this would require a great deal of rethinking about education – especially about formal education.

The second misconception deals with the relations between education and employment. An employment in the public sector is most often considered as a compensation for the number of years of schooling the new employee had invested. In the public sector, wages are fixed according to the number of years of schooling (evidenced by certificates and diplomas) rather than by the complexity of the task to be performed. Initially designed to to encourage students to continue their studies into the university, this practice produced the familiar situation of excessive competition for diplomas. There is, in Ethiopia, a very strong attitude not to take work and the workplace as a stage for rendering service to the public. This attitude can also be seen in the employment policies of the state when new employees are assigned to their post without due regard to their training.

Although the state should encourage through wage policies those

who put the effort to acquire new skills through training, education, it should, at the same time, uphold the principle of fixing wages to type of work. According to such a principle, the determinant of wages would be experience and competence rather than the number of years the candidate has attended school. A job that could be performed by a person with six years education or its equivalent need not be given to someone who has 12 years of schooling.

The tradition of awarding, through progressively higher wages, those who stay in school longer, is a misconception of the role of education that would take several decades to resolve. A beginning can, however, be made by exploring the possibilities of assigning wages to the types and complexities of the tasks to be performed.

### *Real Objectives of Education*

Viewing the role of education as human investment largely responsible for economic growth and therefore national development, has been more common since the early 1960's. For obvious reasons this new attribute is emphasised in the economic strategies of the developing nations. However, in the long history of formal education, its objectives were remotely connected with economic growth and development. Rather, education was perceived as one of the important ideological mechanisms employed by the ruling classes for the maintenance of social and political stability. Together with the religious corporate bodies the school constituted one of the pillars for the inculcation and transmission of socio-political values.

Throughout history the real function of education has been ideological and I believe it shall remain so.<sup>4</sup> This is clearly understood by the Ethiopian government and WPE when the aim of education is argued to be the cultivation of "Marxist-Leninist Ideology" (see appendix). However, the government's position on education has yet to be developed along the following lines.

Firstly, the cultivation of Marxist-Leninist ideology as an aim of education is too narrow. Since its inception the Marxist ideology been a minority ideology. Moreover, in countries like Ethiopia, the scarcity of resources, the tradition against such secular ideology, and the expectation that the education sector be engaged in the creation of productive citizens has created serious constraints.

The cultivation of Ethiopian nationalism and patriotism, I believe, deserves priority for the main reason that these encompass the interests of the greatest majority of the population.

The reorganization of priorities does not imply the exclusion of the

teaching of Marxist-Leninist ideology. It implies, however, a reduction of emphasis which, in turn, affects the allocation of space in textbooks and lesson periods.

Even though formal education is not the only ideological institution entrusted with the creation of a homogeneous ruling elite, it appears that in countries like Ethiopia it plays a crucial role. The existence of more than two widespread religious traditions, the presence of several dominant ethnic nationalities with a long history of conflict and cooperation behind them, and the secular policy of the state have in effect meant that the task of evolving a homogeneous ruling elite and a united population is placed on the education sector.

However, thus far the education sector has not been seriously engaged in this matter due to the rate of expansion and due to the mistaken belief that formal education could be designed to bring about several results simultaneously, i.e., the inculcation of Marxist-Leninist ideology, scientific knowledge, and production technology. The extreme scarcity of resources, the drastic expansion of the sector, the increase in the number of subjects taught, and the shortening of the school day all have combined to virtually defeat the purpose of education.

The entire sector, therefore, needs to be thoroughly reformed if formal education is to fulfill its real function, as an ideological instrument and thereby contribute to nation-building.

One suggested line of reform would be to make a clear distinction between formal and non-formal education: in other words, to develop two parallel structures. As its main objective, formal education would emphasize character formation and the inculcation of nationalist and patriotic values. It would be the task of formal education to produce the skilled manpower to run and manage the bureaucratic machinery of the state, including the responsibility to manage the successive expansion of the basic eight years education.

Non-formal education, carried on outside the premises of formal education, would include every kind of skill training of varying duration. non-formal education would embrace the greatest majority of students who have completed basic primary education, including adult education. The structure of non-formal education would be expected to be flexible, and schools would in theory assume a highly mobile character. Since development in the Ethiopian context is primarily rural development, most of the school activities would be located in the small rural towns and in the countryside.

A reform that takes into account the twin objectives of education, i.e., the inculcation of values and the training of practical skills, needs

to make a clear distinction between formal and non-formal. The division of the sector into formal and informal would have several advantages. It would be easier to evaluate the performance of each sub-sector. It would also be easier to carry out substantive reforms. The division would also lead to a dynamic debate and discussion on the allocation of the budget and on the performance of the sub-sectors. Moreover, it would bring into the open the importance of the role of non-formal education in the country's economic development. And in view of the extent of technological backwardness, it could be envisaged that one of the results of such a reform would be the expansion of informal education at the expense of formal education.

The rambling discussion on the real objectives of education can be summarized as follows. In so far as it is used to describe formal schooling, the main objective of education is the inculcation of values. Such education always needs to be designated as formal education. It would be counterproductive to expect something else from it.

If, however, the goal of the school should to promote the training of production skills, then such education needs to be given separately and on separate premises. Training of skills needs to be entrusted to a different structure that could be designated as the Department of Informal Education. The two structures, i.e., formal and informal, would have different objectives.

A reform of the education sector would have to pay far more attention to the country's predominantly rural economy and population.

#### *Laying down the basis for sector reform*

Unless the groundwork is carefully and thoroughly prepared, a substantial reform would either be difficult to implement or counterproductive. It is, therefore, essential that all aspects of the education system are widely and openly discussed with sufficient time allocated for evaluation, reactions, and commentaries. It is also important to bear in mind that it could take as long as five years before a substantial sector reform could be introduced for implementation.

There are several reasons for the difficulty in introducing and carrying out educational reform. The first is the widespread misconception that parents maintain about education. As the most effective instrument of social mobility, many parents are very keen to see their children through formal education. A great deal of work as well as time would, therefore, be required to demonstrate the

problems around formal schooling in an environment of extreme shortage of resources.

The second reason, more pervasive and intractable, deals with the class interests as well as the underlying conflict between urban and rural regions. In the Ethiopian context education is both formal and urban. Although the government has taken some concrete steps to give education a rural orientation as well as to redress the wide gap of access to education between urban and rural citizens, a great deal of work remains.

Owing to their proximity to the centre of power, the urban population can always make their needs known. Moreover, the greatest majority of decisions of the government are made and carried out by urban dwellers who naturally see to it that urban areas get the lion's share of the nation's resources. In the 1960's the majority of the schools were located in the capital and a few other urban areas. Since then the picture has changed only slightly, more due to the growth of many small towns rather than to the extension of the school and social services to the villages. An educational reform that would respond to the objective needs of the country, as opposed to the vested interests of the urban population, would certainly encounter some degree of resistance. Such resistance could be offset by carrying out a widespread debate and discussion on the situation of the education sector.

Undoubtedly, one of the impressive records of the post-Revolution state is in the field of education. The government, being fully aware of it, has over-emphasized its achievements. To a great extent, therefore, the government has become a prisoner of its own rhetoric. Maintaining that the Old Regime had an elitist education policy, the Revolutionary state showed great zeal in proving its progressive policy – a policy which led to the uncontrolled expansion of the sector. In most essential aspects, however, the educational policy of the Old Regime was not very different from that of the revolutionary state. With the exception of the literacy campaigns the rate of expansion between 1960-1974 and 1975-88 was comparable. The Imperial Regime was aware of the education crisis in the same way as the post-1974 government has been. The Old Regime attempted to introduce reform and failed. The reason for the failure was that neither the need for reform nor the reform itself involved the participation of the urban social forces, i.e. teachers, students, and parents.

The main problem with any social reform does not lie in the design of the reform model itself but rather in its implementation. Human beings are by nature conservative; hence the best way to ensure a successful implementation of a reform model is to initiate a



comprehensive discussion from below. This is a democratic process as well as an obligation of a government; after all the main business of government is to execute policies that originate from below.

Before we proceed to explore the range of topics for public discussion, there are practical matters that need to be dealt with. These concern the infrastructure required in order to initiate discussion. Who writes about the education crisis? Who would exercise the responsibility of censorship? Where would the funds come for the publication of position papers?

A small national committee would have to be formed and entrusted with the task of commissioning studies on the dimensions of the education sector. The committee would function like a research council. The responsibility would better be exercised by the government rather than by MOE. The funds would have to be solicited from those countries and international organizations with a long history of involvement in Ethiopian education. Commentaries, reactions, and evaluations would best be made public through a periodical that would have to be initiated for the purpose. In this infrastructural phase and throughout the period up to the implementation of reform, the manpower resources of the Institute of Educational Research, Addis Ababa University could be of considerable importance. The satisfactory resolution of these practical matters is, I believe, crucial for the success of the reform of the sector. I shall now discuss some of the events that could result from the reform.

The first issue that needs to be widely discussed is the role of education in development. This problem is indeed extensive and complex, but its main outline could be dealt with in a monograph. Among the concepts that would be extensively covered are education, urban and rural development, culture, and society. The relationship between education and culture would also be explored. Moreover, the study would be expected to throw light on the type of education that would suit Ethiopia.

The second range of problems that could be dealt within the parameters of a monograph deal with the economics of education. This would concentrate on the responsibility as well as capability of the state in the expansion of education. Considerable space would also be devoted to the history of expenditures on education in relation to national expenditure. Due attention would have to be given to the economics of the "quality" of education. Within this scope the role and relevance of foreign loans and assistance for education need to be extensively discussed and documented. Last but not least, the role of

private corporations, e.g. religious mission schools and the schools run by foreign communities, need to be objectively assessed. Such a study would dispel many myths surrounding the role of the government on the expansion of education. The message that a nation has to limit its policies to the extent of its budget as well as the consequences of foreign loans would clearly emerge for the public.

Another area of considerable importance for the implementation of the reform deals with the role of teachers and parents. A discussion paper would partly explore the extent to which teachers and parents can be involved in the evolution of educational policy. How would teachers like their place of work, i.e., the school, to look like? What do parents expect from school? What would parents expect the school to teach? This would be by far the most difficult task to accomplish. The experience as well as the commitment of teachers might be limited. Many parents may not be able to conceptualize and express what they want and expect. As we know, it is easy to express a dissatisfaction but difficult to articulate the changes that would solve or neutralize the areas of dissatisfaction.

The range of topics mentioned above are by no means exhaustive. Many related and new topics would be discovered. What is important is that the evolution of an educational policy with full participation of the interested social forces (teachers, parents, educational experts, professional associations) would greatly increase the chances of the implementation of a policy. Moreover, the experiment would be an extremely useful part of the democratic process of running the affairs of the country, – a process to which the WPE and the government are earnestly committed, especially since the formation of the Republic.

This section would be incomplete without a comment on the role of economic policies on the present and future educational situation. At the outset I wish to make it clear that I lack training on this complex subject. Therefore, the comments below should be seen as purely personal political opinion. As discussed earlier, secondary education is characterized by an overflow of thousands of graduates who are poorly trained for employment in the modern sector. The modern sector is, however, largely made up of the public sector. With the exception of the Ministry of Defence, the public sector has expanded far beyond the limits of bureaucratic rationale. Recurrent budget, i.e. salaries and fixed expenses, eat up to 90 per cent of the budget, leaving very little for investments. Further expansion of the public sector, without a comparable growth of the private sector and national revenue, would only lead to the indebtedness of the country.

The private sector, which in normal circumstances competes with the

public sector for skilled and qualified labour, has been on the decline since 1974. The indiscriminate nationalization policies and the attempts to convert the state into an entrepreneur have had negative effects on the growth of the private sector. Unless substantially reformed, the economic policies of the post-revolution state would further contribute to the stagnation of the economy at a period of high population increase. Indeed the government has begun to address the need for economic liberalization since the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee of WPE towards the end of 1988. This was based on the recognition of the role of the private sector for economic development in the country. The commitment of the government and party to economic liberalization needs, however, to be more clear and consistent. The role of the private sector needs to be clearly recognized. This would inevitably lead to a redefinition and adaptation of the "Marxist-Leninist" ideology.

The first priority area for reform is the land tenure system. The agrarian reform of 1975 made land available to every peasant, but it did not and most probably could not stimulate the expansion of land for cultivation. What has happened since 1975 is that the same land mass has been redistributed to an ever increasing number of peasants. According to one source, the land available to Ethiopian peasants which was 0.83 hectare per peasant has been reduced to 0.73 hectare during the last seven years.<sup>5</sup> No doubt the continuous redistribution of land and the high element of uncertainty of tenure play a role in the absolute decline of agricultural production. Collectivization and the continued efforts to organize producers' cooperatives could hardly compensate for the effects of indiscriminate implementation of the land reform proclamation.

It ought to be possible for successful peasants and farmers to increase their land holdings as well as to enjoy the fruits of their labour. Such an action would require a rethinking on the feasibility of the introduction of private ownership of land. Although it is theoretically possible to argue in favour of the present agrarian system, such an argument would only remain at the level of theory. In reality, production becomes dynamic only when the means of production are owned privately.

A serious rethinking of considerable privatization of land need not mean a revitalization of the reality that prevailed during the pre-revolution period. What it would mean is that the state would have to resort to other means of protecting economically disadvantaged citizens.

The rural land proclamation of 1975 and the extensive as well as

excessive nationalizations have caused serious harm to the private productive sector. Private savings and investments, the main indicators of development, were gravely affected. With the decline of agricultural production in absolute terms and drastic population growth, the prospects for the future indeed look far from promising. Serious and consistent measures ought to be taken in order to arrest the worsening of the socio-economic crisis. These measures include the introduction of private ownership of land, the abolition of price restrictions, and the solemn declaration of the inalienable rights to property.

It is hard to imagine that the reform of the education sector would bring about positive results until the current economic policies are reviewed along the lines delineated above. The connections between the type of educational reform and economic policies are indeed very close. Educational reform designed to enhance economic productivity has a greater possibility of success only when the government abolishes restrictions on the economic sphere.

#### *A reformed education sector: A purely personal opinion*

A great deal has been written by Ethiopian and foreign experts on the various problems affecting Ethiopia and its society. However, very few attempts are made to identify the problems concretely and suggest realistic policy options. The Ergese project and many of the papers read to the National Conference on Population Issues in Ethiopia's National Development are replete with vague formulations and even more vague policy recommendations. During the course of writing this paper, I wondered several times about the tendency of Ethiopian experts to limit themselves to pointing out the need for action, thus leaving the policy makers in the dark.

What I shall presently outline ought to be seen as one set of views articulated with the intention of pushing the frontiers of discussion from an awareness of crisis into a strategy for its resolution. If they are not seen in this light, I would be accused of flagrant self-contradiction as well as of anticipating the results of studies which have yet to be initiated.

I am also aware that I am tramping into a very complex field where educational experts would be extremely careful. There are two reasons for my decision to do so. Firstly, reform of the education sector is partly a sphere for educational expertise and partly a sphere of politics. To put it more concretely, it is a political decision whether schools should concentrate on Ethiopian or European history. The implementation of such a political decision would, however, fall within

the sphere of educational expertise. It is, therefore, within the former context that I shall frame the type of reform that I would like see introduced. Secondly, I hope that the views expressed below will be taken as points of departure for the extensive and continuing discussion that hopefully soon will be initiated on this vital national issue.

The reformed education sector that I wish to see in operation in the near future would be based on two principles: i) clear preference for quality, and, ii) commitment to equitable distribution of access to education.

### *Quality of education*

The implications of the crisis of education on the society could only be arrested by a carefully studied reform of the sector. The reformed sector would stress quality of education as its main priority. The commitment to quality of education as policy and praxis, would result in the reorganization of the entire sector. Key concepts such as education, educational goals, and quality would have to be clearly defined. A sector organized to stress quality over quantity of student population would naturally solve some of the bottlenecks and create new problems.

One of the problems to be solved would be the assignment of graduates to the teaching profession. Under the regime of the reformed education sector, teachers would be recruited on the basis of competence and be subject to dismissal on the grounds of incompetency. It would be indeed possible to envisage the development of a teaching corps that is proud of its profession.

Another problem that would be solved would be the overcrowding of classes as well as subjects. The size of classes would be determined by the nature of the subject matter and by the number of students that a teacher (of a subject) could handle without having to compromise the quality of the subject taught. Likewise the length of the school day and the number of subjects taught would be put under close and continuous scrutiny where the measure would always be the creation of a suitable environment for carrying out teaching with quality.

The reorganization of the education sector would give rise to many problems. Only some can be outlined here below. The first problem would relate to educational targets. Since the Addis Ababa Conference on Education in Africa (1961), the campaign for universal primary education has been on the agenda of the new states. The expansion of the education sector with the intention of eliminating illiteracy is still

perceived in many quarters as synonymous with laying down the basis for development. There is a great deal of ethnocentrism as well as naivety in equating the expansion of primary education (irrespective of relevance and quality) with development.<sup>6</sup> Formally illiterate societies are in many ways highly literate and have, therefore, very little to gain from a primary education drive that does not take into account their needs.<sup>7</sup>

The size of the reformed education sector would be determined by the criteria of quality and the allocated budget, both of which are rather inflexible. For many years to come there would be millions of children who would not join the modern school. Without prejudice to the contributions of the community and private corporations in the field of education, it would serve no useful purpose for the Ethiopian state to plan in terms of targets for universal access to primary education. The main reason is that an education sector entrusted to meet educational targets (in terms of percentage of school age population in school) would inevitably have to compromise quality in favour of quantity.

There is one way where the government can demonstrate its commitment to a rapid expansion of the sector without compromising quality. This is to elevate education as the next top priority after the Ministry of Defence. This would in effect mean that the budget for education would increase rapidly so as to reach the level with countries who are reputed to give education top priority.

A second option that to some extent could increase the rate of expansion is the planning of eight years primary education as terminal for the greatest majority of the students. The demarcation that most students would be streamlined to the world of labour after eight years of primary education could be made clear by raising the age of entry to grade 1 from the present of approximately seven years to preferably ten years of age. This, in turn, would give rise to a host of other problems that would require the resourcefulness of parents and neighbourhood associations.

Eight years of basic education would, I believe, be sufficient for the achievement of educational goals such as a good base in reading, arithmetic, writing, and history. Graduating students would be old enough to join the world of labour either directly or after a short period of skill-training programmes.

Another result of the reform of the sector with quality as the organizing principle would be the division of education into formal and informal. Briefly mentioned earlier, a strict division of formal and informal education would inevitably result in the allocation of the

budget and in the continuous debate on the division of responsibilities. Taking the objective reality of the country, i.e., an agrarian society characterized by a growing population and a declining food production, most of the resources for post-primary education ought to be devoted to informal education. Moreover, the division of education into formal and informal could very well lead to the development of two parallel school systems at the primary education level.

The implementation of an educational policy centered around quality would inevitably give rise to the emergence of an elite – whose education would be financed by the taxpayer. While the emergence of an elite would be a truism, the reformed educational system could be charged with producing a ruling elite. The accusation would be very hard to dismiss. The restriction of education to fewer students (due to limited resources and the division of education into formal and informal) carried out in an environment of substantial economic liberalization would certainly be interpreted in terms of the widening gap between the educated few and the rest.

Such a development would certainly call for a review of the "Marxist-Leninist ideology." If and when such an eventuality materializes, it needs to be seen positively, because a positive attitude could very well enrich the basis of the ideology itself. If, however, some aspects of the "Marxist-Leninist Ideology" prove to be incompatible with Ethiopian reality, then the government and the Party would bear the obligation of making the necessary exceptions. For ideology, even that of Marxism-Leninism, is only a means (an instrument) to an end and not an end in itself.

#### *Commitment to equitable distribution of access to education*

The commitment of the Ethiopian state to equitable distribution of access to education would have to be stressed more clearly, especially in view of the limits put on uncontrolled expansion of the sector caused by the criteria of quality and budget. The implementation of such commitment would also be rather different from the present policy. There are two dimensions of the principle. The first dimension deals with the already existing gap of access to education between the urban and rural regions. Only 14 per cent of the junior and virtually none of the senior secondary schools are located in the rural areas.

A policy of equitable distribution of access to education between rural and urban regions is bound to take the current situation as a point of departure. This would mean that there would be more schools in the urban areas and that the latter would continue to consume a

large part of the resources. The wide gap between urban and rural appears to be a structural problem that the government can do very little to change. Bureaucracies are located in urban areas and run by urban dwellers. Instead of attempting to establish the same institutions and structures in the countryside, it might be wise to come an understanding of the relations between urban and rural.

The commitment to equitable distribution of access could be seen in the expansion of informal education in the rural areas. In other words, the government would develop a method whereby comparable resources would be spent for formal education in the urban areas and for informal education in the rural areas. The division of the country into zones of formal education (urban areas) and zones of informal education (rural areas) could no doubt give rise to a criticism of favouring the urban areas vis a vis the rural. The dependence of the city on the countryside as well as the subjugation of the countryside by the city is a phenomenon as old as the history of the first cities approximately ten thousand years ago. Education policies would make a great deal of sense if they were to be developed by people who appreciate the role of the countryside for the welfare of urban areas.

Far more complex is the second dimension, namely the gap of distribution of access to education between the regions of the country. Although the disparity between regions has greatly diminished since 1974, a great deal of work remains to be done. As much as 40 per cent of junior and 35 per cent of senior secondary schools are located in Shewa and Addis Ababa.

Regional disparity in the distribution of access to education is to a great extent a reflection of the degree of concentration of economic power of the country. Up to 1974, most of the modern productive activities were located in the environs of Addis Ababa and Asmara. The dominant positions of these two metropolises could be clearly seen in the field of education. Therefore, although models could be developed designed to reduce regional disparity, their implementation would entirely depend on regional development policies and on the commitment of the government to economic decentralization.

#### *Concluding remarks*

The state of knowledge on the Ethiopian education, in spite of the remarkable survey by Ergese and the voluminous reports stored in the MOE, is far from satisfactory. Most of the policy makers within the MOE and the government are indeed aware about the crisis of education but have difficulties with articulating firstly, the dimensions



of the crisis and secondly, the strategies for their resolution. There have been many reasons militating against the evolution of an Ethiopian oriented policy. One of these reasons has undoubtedly been the belief that education held the key to social and economic development. The vital component, i.e., the relevance of the curriculum to the social and cultural reality, is still hardly realized. That formal education has very little to do with development of the material basis of a society has yet to gain a wider acceptance.

Another reason which has inhibited the growth of knowledge on the role of education in society, is the lack of participatory tradition in political culture. Decision-making as well as policy formation were the exclusive prerogatives of the royalty. The 1974 Revolution broke down the old system and has laid down the basis for a more democratic management of public affairs. Although many decades would pass before policy makers and the citizens fully appreciate the scope and limitations of their rights, the first steps have to be taken now. A thousand mile journey begins by taking a first step. This first step is to encourage a wider discussion on the state of education.

The future does not seem to offer a great optimism to Ethiopia and its inhabitants. Unresolved ethnic/regional conflicts, rapidly growing population, a deteriorating ecology, and gradually decreasing interest from the outside world all indicate to the hard times in the making. On the other hand, the Ethiopian people have not yet begun to make full use of their individual and collective energies. An exhaustive and nation-wide enquiry into the role of education would most certainly initiate the beginnings of a culture of resurgence.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Schultz, Theodore, "Investment in Human Capital", *The American Economic Review*, 41: 1 (1961) 1-17. Although not directly, Shultz's views have been criticized by Henry Levin in a recent study on, "The Limits of Educational Reform", in *Educational Planning and Social Change*, edited by Hans N. Weiler, Unesco, 1980, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Shultz, T., "Nobel Lecture: The Economics of Being Poor", *Journal of Political Economy*, 88:4 (1980) 640.

<sup>3</sup> However the belief that education is the key to development would be very hard to challenge due to the real need of people educated abroad to manage the apparatus of the state. Virtually every department of the Ethiopian state communicates with its counterpart in the developed world. English remains the semi-official language. Aid and international trade are carried in medium other than Amharic. However the supply of future bureaucrats to the government organs is a very small function of the education sector.

<sup>4</sup> In the western world, the job of creating a homogenous population is being

successively taken care by the media. As a result the school finds itself in a state of disarray.

<sup>5</sup> See Solomon Bellete, "Population Growth and Agricultural Development in Ethiopia", Paper read for the *National Conference on Population Issues in Ethiopia's National Development*, Addis Ababa, July, 1989, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> See Ingemar Fägerlind and Lawrence, J. Saha, *Education and National Development: A Comparative Perspective*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 1983 (1986).

<sup>7</sup> Kneller, George, F., *Educational Anthropology*, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1965; Negussie, Birgit, *Traditional Wisdom and Modern Development: A Case Study of Traditional Pre-natal Knowledge Among Elderly Women in Southern Shewa, Ethiopia*, Ph.D. dissertation, Stockholm University, 1988; Brokensha, David, *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Development*, Washington, University of America Press, 1980; Horton, Robert, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science," *Africa*, 37:50 (1967) 155-87.



A few days before this manuscript was ready for printing, the Ethiopian government announced its intention of introducing wide ranging changes in the economic and political policies of the country. (Ethiopian Embassy, Stockholm, press release of March 6, 1990) In the economic sphere the government intends to safeguard and encourage private initiative. Regarding the political orientation, the Ethiopian government intends to introduce changes in the "structure and content of the Workers Party." The Party will be organised to embrace all classes.

The implementation of these changes will go a long way in laying down the preconditions for the reform of the educational sector discussed in this study.

A PLAN FOR ETHIOPIA'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM\*

F. Ernest Work

Through the influence of some of my former students who are also among my very best friends, I was asked by His Majesty, Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, to come to his country to make a study of the situation and to make recommendations for an educational system which this forward-looking man wishes to have developed among his people. The young men to whom I refer above are: Malaku E. Bayen, now a student in Howard University, where he is well along in a course of medicine. Upon his graduation from this institution he hopes to return to his country where I am sure he will be able to accomplish a tremendous amount of good for his king and his country. Another is Bashawarad Habbewold, now returned to Ethiopia, where he is rendering great service as mayor of the second city in size in the country. Then, too, there is Worku Gobena who has also returned to his country and is doing service for the government.

Upon arriving at the Capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, just in the midst of great preparations for the brilliant coronation ceremonies, I set myself to study the people and the conditions surrounding them that I might be able to make sound recommendations for an educational system. My readers will know that this country is really the only bit of Africa still in the control of the natives of that continent. Even this is completely surrounded by possessions of some European country, and citizens of these European countries are extremely active and zealous in efforts to fix upon the Ethiopians the trade and culture of their respective countries. In my work there I found this influence the greatest hindrance to my efforts in getting any real progress under way. The Ethiopians themselves are intelligent and clever and are led by a quite unusual man in their Emperor, but because of the conflicting advice and suggestions offered by these various European peoples, they have become confused and slow to follow leadership from abroad because they have found that in most cases these foreigners have been interested in

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\**Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. III, No. 1, January 1934, pp. 66-68.

securing advantages for their respective countries rather than the good of Ethiopia.

From all sides I was asked what sort of an educational system I proposed to suggest--they hoped it would be French or Italian or English, depending upon the one asking. They often suggested it would be American since I came from America. My answer was always that so far as I was concerned it should be neither French, Italian, English, nor American. That I hoped it could be Ethiopian. I have traveled through much of Africa and I have found everywhere an effort of the European country having control, to fix that country's culture upon the Africa. This I am convinced is a great mistake and I am anxious that Ethiopia at least be permitted to develop its own culture and, in fact, be aided in so doing.

After making a careful study of the situation, I have offered the following plan: First, since Ethiopia has a language of its own, this language is the one that should be used as a medium through which its people are to secure an education. At present the language lacks many words necessary to make it a means for modern education and to remedy this I have suggested a commission of the best prepared men who know well that language plus one or two other persons who understand the building up of words and languages. Let these men make a study of the Amharic language and make up the words needed by going back into its mother tongue or dead language as Europeans and Americans go back into Latin and Greek to make a new word when one is needed in our languages. By so doing, the language can be made full and rich and of much more use to Ethiopians than any other language could be. No doubt the present form of writing Amharic will have to be modified so as to be adapted to the use of present day machines such as typewriting machines. This I believe can be done in one of two ways: either simplify the present alphabet to fewer characters or adopt the Roman alphabet as we have done and then spell their words phonetically. The latter, I believe, would be the simpler way. However, I have great sympathy with the Ethiopians who are loath to give up their form of writing which they have used so many years.

Second, after the Amharic language has been thus enriched, there should be textbooks prepared in this language for all school purposes. At present there are almost no such books. Before an Ethiopian boy can make any sort of study, he must first learn some foreign language and in it get all his information through a language not his own and, what he does thus laboriously learn, is almost entirely about some other country than his own. Pages about France

and Napoleon; Italy and Garibaldi; England and Gladstone, but almost nothing about Ethiopia and Menelik and His Majesty their most worthy Emperor. This should not be. Ethiopian boys and girls should be educated in their own language, learn about their own country and men and interesting things, as well as the world in general.

Third, there is great need for a school in which Ethiopia's own men and women can become trained to become teachers of others. It is neither desirable nor possible for Ethiopia to continue long to employ foreigners to teach their schools and one of the most pressing and urgent needs is the establishment of the foundation of a University of Ethiopia--the first department of which should be a teachers' training school. At first this should be conducted by folk from outside--Americans preferred, since America can do it in a much more disinterested way than can any European country because of European grabbing rivalry for African lands. I have therefore recommended the founding of such a university at once to which other departments may be added as needed. It is this phase of their education in which I am now most interested, in the hope that some day we can find some person or some group with vision enough to see the great opportunity here to make excellent use of surplus funds.

The fourth item in the program that I have recommended to His Majesty's government is that a definite plan or system of education be adopted and plans made to follow it to completion as young people become more educated. This I have made and left with those in charge. As far as possible I have tried to make the plan specially suited to Ethiopia. Briefly, it provides some six years of elementary education within reach of all. Above this and branching off from it, we have provided for industrial and trade schools, including agriculture and homemaking into which many boys and girls should go. In addition to these schools and above the six years of elementary work we have provided for five or six additional years for those who may wish to go into the business and professional world. And on top of all this we have provided for a university training intended to provide opportunity for all lines of endeavor when fully developed.

Of course much of this is in anticipation in the far future but a good start has been made. In addition to the many mission schools here and there about the country, Ethiopia has government schools in some ten or twelve centers. At the capital there is an excellent school, built by Her Majesty the Empress, where girls are being trained along household lines in addition to the usual academic classes, and there are here two rather large schools where many boys

are having an opportunity for an education up to about the equivalent of our high school grade. There is now a great need for a school above this to take those who are capable on into different lines of training so that the young men may not have to leave the country when they wish to continue their studies.

In closing I wish to express my appreciation of the Ethiopian people among whom I worked and my admiration for His Majesty, the Emperor, and his family. I shall always prize highly my opportunity here and I hold most dear my Ethiopian friendships. My hope is that soon the way may open up for great progress in education in the "Switzerland of Africa." May God's blessing rest upon Ethiopia.

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